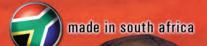




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> Hardware Roundup PlayStation 2 Peripherals ASUS DigiMatrix, Viewsonic VP181b LCD Screen

It's a jungle out there
Battlefield Vietnam
- exclusive interview

124 pages of great stuff!



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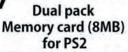




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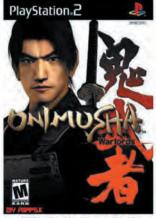








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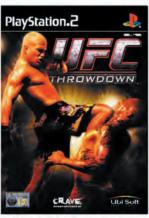
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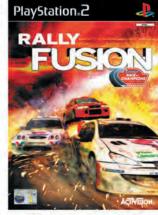
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EXCLUSIVE TO GAMECUBE!

TWIN SNAKES debuts on the NINTENDO GAMECUBE in Metal Gear Solid - The Twin Snakes.

After achieving worldwide success and awards for both the original Metal Gear Solid and Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, series creator, Hideo Kojima combines the essence of both games into one unique experience.

- Fuses the story of Metal Gear Solid and the visual of Metal Gear Solid 2
- Incorporates actions from Metal Gear Solid 2 such as first person shooting
- From Hideo Kojima, original creator of the Metal Gear Solid series
- Exclusively on GAMECUBE

KONAMI

THE TWIN S NAKES











REGULARS

- Ed's Note Technology News
- PC News
- Console News Lazy Gamer's Guide: Logitech Bluetooth Desktop
- Legacy: Bioware Domain of The_Basilisk
- Community.za
- Leisure Reviews: Books & CDs
- Alt.gaming
- On the Web
- Anime Inbox
- Game Over

FEATURES

- **Future Consoles**
- Hardcore: Console Peripheral Round-Up
- C&C Generals Zero Hour Strategy Guide

PREVIEWS

- Far Cry Battlefield Vietnam
- Syberia II
- Joan of Arc
- Fable
- Painkiller
- Forbidden Siren

REVIEWS

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

PC

PC

PS2

GBA

GBA

GBA

GBA

PC

PC PC

PC PC

PC GBA

PC PC

PS2

PS2

PS₂ GCN

PS2

PS2 PS2

PS2 PS2

PS2

GCN

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Battlefield Vietnam | Star Wars: Battlefront | Terry Tate #5 | Van Helsing **Drivers** ATi CATALYST V4.1 | NVIDIA ForceWare v53.03 & 04 Patches Call of Duty: Multiplayer v1.02 Lock-On: Modern Air Combat v1.01 | Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic v1.02 Add-ons NFS: Underground Dynamic Desktop | NFS: Underground Media Player Skin Utilities The usual bunch plus Winamp 5.01 & skins | DirectX 9.0b | Cheats & Hints + many more

Demos Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time **Movies**

These few brave companies make the Cover CD a reality every month... Think fondly of them!









"Far Cry could well
represent the biggest
stride in Al since
stride and could be
Half-Life and could be
one package holiday
one package holiday
you don't want to miss
out on"

-PC Zone







Glorious graphics and advanced A.I.



Large selection of weapons and equipment











It's a jumple out there Battleheld Victnam Far Cry

There is an interesting story

about this issues cover - it was originally going to be an idyllic tropical island shot from Far Cry with some tough guy making his way toward the edge of the page. The artwork didn't arrive in time and as luck would have it Flectronic Arts came to the rescue with the Battlefield Vietnam cover artwork you see here. The odd thing is that both these games feature a jungle as a backdrop so the catchy [corny] phrase, 'It's a jungle out there' still worked - no matter what artwork we used. Anyway, go and have a look at these two games they're both set to be huge. Far Cry is on page 44 and Battlefield Vietnam is on page 48.

Anyway, thanks to Jason for trying to make things work and to Claire for downloading 500 MB in one afternoon.;)

Real stuff

Now that we calculate computer speeds in gigahertz and bolt on extra fans just to keep everything cool, computer games are beginning to show off extra features designed to make games look good and feel real. These days most newly developed game engines have evolved enough for us to start seeing realistic looking situations. An example is lighting, gone are the days when you had a single overhead spotlight that statically lit the level and perhaps a few additional spots here and there to break up the monotony. These days lights and light fittings behave more or less as you'd expect them to in real life - these lights can be shot causing them to swing around wildly while casting dancing shadows on every surface in the room, and all of this happens without your graphics card missing a beat. Given all this advancement and technology dare we expect more realistic games and if so what is the definition of realistic?

Particle effects, fog, dynamic lighting, ambient lighting and rag doll physics are all nice technological gimmicks designed to impress the game playing consumer, but are of no meaningful use other than to show off an expensive graphics engine and help get the player immersed in the game. It's great to walk through a foggy level not knowing what to expect just a few feet in front of you - this creates convincing immersion in the game world and the better a development team implements this, the more of a success their title becomes - simple.

This topic has been covered from many different angles over the years because it's the most exciting aspect of game development; there are few gamers who care about sound effects and how the control system is implemented, it's the graphics that pull the crowds. But no matter how realistic your game looks, the thing that gets to me from a realism point of view is that while everyone is comparing notes on shadows, textures and number of polygons per knuckle I look at the lack of realism when it comes to the more straight forward things. I found one good example while playing through Far Cry. At some point in the game you must sneak onto a rusty shipwrecked aircraft carrier and pop all the bad guys. Despite the excellent artificial intelligence and the realistic tropical setting I came across a machine gunner positioned directly under a few tons of metal beams, held up only by a few dangling chains (odd placement) I wonder what the construction engineer needed all those beams up there for anyway and equally unrealistic, especially considering the damage the rest of the vessel has taken, this precarious arrangement should have come tumbling down years ago. Nevertheless, the obvious reason for the way things are in this scenario is for the enjoyment of it all; all you need to do is shoot at the chains and the whole lots comes tumbling down effectively squashing bad guy number 43. Who cares about realism when you're raining metal beams down on some guys' coconut? It's just funny that they labour away for months on a realistic physics engine only to go and use it like that...

Side Note

An interesting, and perhaps sad piece of news for some, landed on my desk the other day regarding Legend Entertainment - it's been shut down by publisher Atari and most of the development team was sent packing.

Legend's latest project was Unreal II: Special Edition which featured the XMP [Extended Multiplayer] component to the game. This is also the company that made Unreal II: The Awakening. They have an interesting history first starting out in 1989 as a developer and publisher of adventure games, eventually moving over to development only. In 1998 they were acquired by GT Interactive who were then consumed by Infogrames who then became Atari, and now poof goes Legend Entertainment. Farewell to a legacy and thanks for making some cool games, you'll be missed.

Well, it's been fun, make sure you get our next issue - April is birthday month for NAG Magazine and that means good things for everyone.

Michael James [Editor]

Caption of the Month Competition



Bee fun knee

Each month we'll select a screenshot from

one of the games in the issue and write a funny caption for it, well... we'll try and make it funny...

Your job is to see if you can come up with an even funnier caption and send it to: ed@nag.co.za

Subject: March Caption

If you use the wrong subject in your e-mail it'll get deleted...

Your prize: Our sponsor for the screenshot of the month competition is Vivendi Universal Games. They said they'll give us something interesting each month... if we don't want it we'll be sure to send it along to the winner mentioned to the right of this... here...?



'When gamers dream...' - NAG's [76% lame] effort



'How could my father have known she wasn't really a Russian mail order bride?' - **Anton Botha**















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- nVidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra GPU
- · Supports the new AGP 8X and latest Direct 9.0
- · Integrated with 256MB DDR memory
- · Features DVI-I, TV-Out and D-Sub connetors
- · All new 256-bit memory interface
- · Supports video capture for video editing (VIVO)
- · Supports Gigabyte "V-TUNER" overclocking application
- · Bundles three world-class games and PowerDVD 5.0











RADEON 9800 XT GV-R98X256D

- Powered by ATI RADEON" 9800 XT Visual Processing Unit (VPU)
- · Supports the new AGP 8X standard.
- · Integrated latest 256MB DDR Memory
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- 8 parallel rendering pipelines process up to 3.3G pixels per second.
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802.11g Wireless Router GN-B49G

- . 802.11g compliant, supports Super G with data transfer rate of up to 108 Mbps
- · Gigabyte Smart Setup II, Plug & Play,
- High Security: WPA, 802.1x, 64/128/152 WEP
- · Smart DHCP, no IP conflict
- Advanced Web Management and firmware upgrade

USB Wireless Lan & Storage stick GN-WLBZ201

- IEEE 802.11b and WIFI compliant
- · Unique 3D Rotation LAN card to locate best signal quality
- · Unique Signal quality display helps user locate optimal signal
- · 128MB Flash memory with wireless LAN driver inside, convenient driver installation
- · Supports Windows 98/ ME/ 2000/ XP















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- · Supports the new AGP 8X and latest DirectX
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- · Supports the new AGP 8X standard
- · Supports the latest Microsoft® DirectX® 9.0
- · Eight parallel rendering pipelines process up to 3 billion pixels per second
- · All new 256-bit memory interface
- · DVI-I and TV-Out connector supported
- · Supports GIGABYTE V-Tuner for overclocking
- Bundles three world-class games and PowerDVD 5.0

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- · 802.11g compliant, supports Super G with data transfer rate of up to 108 Mbps
- · Upgradeable to dual band, double the bandwidth
- · Supports Gigabyte AP Manager
- · High Security: 802.1x, 64/128/152 WEP, ACL (Access Control List)



Cardbus Wireless Lan GN-WMAG

- IEEE802.11g compliant
- · Wi-Fi compliant
- · Interface : Cardbus
- · Wireless Chipset : Atheros
- Security: support 64/128/152 bit WEP standard & AES
- Support 802.11e QoS(Quality of Service)
- Support Windows 98/SE/ME/2000/XP/NT4.0
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- Supports 800MHz FSB Pentium® 4 CPU with HT Technology
- · Dual Channel DDR400 architecture with ECC support
- AGP 8X with AGP Pro interface for work-station graphics
- · GIGABYTE patented Dual Power System 2 (DPS 2) design
- · Integrated Adaptec Ultra320 SCSI controller
- Integrated Intel® PRO/1000 CT Network Connection
- · Integrated Serial-ATA interface with RAID 0 function
- Integrated GigaRAID IDE RAID interface
- · Features Performance Acceleration Technology (PAT)

SCS ATA133 RAID USB 2.0 Intel PRO DualBIOS Xpress 6-Channel Audio | EasyTune 4 | Q-Flash | @BIOS | Multi-Lang BIOS



















AND PERSON AGENT A

· Supports new generation AMD Athlon 64 processors

· GIGABYTE Dual Power System-K8 (DPS-K8) design

Enhances system performance with DDR400 memory

· Dual LAN solution with Gigabit LAN solution integrated

. Integrated Serial-ATA interface with RAID 0.1 function

IEEE 13946 ATA 133 RAID | Dual LAN | USB 2.0 | DualBIOS"

Integrated GigaRAID IDE RAID Interface

· Integrated T.I. IEEE 1394b FireWire interface

GA-K8NNXP NVIDIA nForce3 150 Chipset







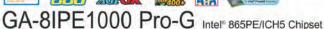












- · Supports 800MHz FSB Pentium 4 CPU with HT Technology · New generation Dual Channel DDR400 architecture
- · Supports AGP 8X interface for excellent graphics performance
- · Integrated Serial-ATA interface
- Integrated T.I. IEEE1394 interface
- · Integrated Marvel Gigabit Ethernet controller
- · Gigabyte patented DualBIOS? technology design

IEEE 1394 USB 2.0 Gigabit LAN | DualBIOS" | Anti-Burn" | Xpress







GA-8S661FXM SIS 661FX/963L Chipset

- Supports IntelR Pentium® 4 800MHz FSB Processor with HT Technology
- · Enhance system performance with DDR 400 memory
- · Integrated Real 256E Graphics engine
- Supports AGP 8X interface for higher graphics performance
- · Integrated 6-channel AC'97 audio with Jack-Sensing
- · Integrated 10/100Mb Ethernet controller
- · Provides 6 USB 2.0 ports for high-speed connectivity



USB 2.0 6-Ch Audio+Jack Sensing Xpress* EasyTune 4

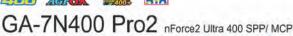
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- · Supports AMD Athlon" XP 400MHz FSB processor
- · Supports Dual Channel DDR400 memory architecture
- · Integrated Serial-ATA interface with RAID 0.1 function
- Integrated GigaRAID IDE RAID Interface
- · Integrated Gigabit LAN Ethernet controller
- · Supports high quality 6-channel audio · Integrated IEEE 1394 FireWire interface

EEE 1394 ATA133 RAID Gigabit LAN 6-Channel Audio USB 2.0 DualBIOS" EasyTune 4 Q-Flash @BIOS







GA-7VM400M VIA KM400/ 8235 Chipset

· Supports AMD Athlon" XP 333MHz FSB processor

- · Enhance system performance with DDR 333 memory
- · Integrated UniChrome graphics engine
- · Integrated 6-channel AC'97 audio with S/P-DIF function
- · Integrated 10/100Mb Ethernet controller
- · Provides 6 USB 2.0 ports for high-speed connectivity

USB 2.0 10/100 LAN 6-Channel Audio EasyTune 4 Q-Flash* @BIOS*







tech news:

LG G7050 cell-phone



LG's new G7050 phone introduces a sliding keypad, and is equipped with a 128x160 colour screen and a rear-mounted digital camera capable of sequence shots and packing a 4x digital zoom. The menu system is fully graphical, and the phone boasts voice activation for frequently used functions. The phone is available locally and will retail for R2499.00.

THX audiovisual standards



A company called THX, formerly a subsidiary of LucasArts and

heavily involved in the film industry, is working on establishing a set of standards for audio and visual production equipment in the gaming industry. Several high-profile games have already been released with the THX logo, including The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King and Need for Speed: Underground. THX intends to audit game developers' studios to ensure that they meet specifications appropriate to their requirements.

Omotions-Golf



This innovative new peripheral consists of a golf ball on a free-swinging arm. Throughout this assembly there are sensors that accurately measure various kinetic elements. such as the strength and direction of the stroke, as well as hook and slice. The device allows players to use their own clubs while playing PC golf games. The peripheral will be available by mid-year, and a console adapter will also be offered. A similar device for baseball games is planned.www.listentobelieve.com

NVIDIA mobilises



NVIDIA may well be entering into the handheld gaming market, particularly in light of its recent acquisition of MediaQ. NVIDIA's GoForce range of media processors, some featuring camera support, have been used in numerous PDAs and cellphones, and could well end up powering handheld gaming devices.

Ingineo Evetop Centra



This is a pair of sunglasses that feature a tiny 16-bit colour LCD display in the lower centre of one lens, and built-in earphones. The device connects via a cable to a beltworn control unit that carries controls such as brightness, contrast and volume. The control unit itself connects to virtually any video source, including PCs, cameras and portable DVD players.

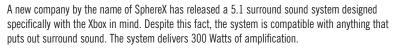


Sport gaming the new rage





SSD has unveiled a console called PORT, which is about the size of a PSOne. It makes use of what the company calls XaviX technology, which allows peripheral-based motion detection for sport simulation games. Three games are currently available for the PORT: XaviX Baseball, XaviX Bowling and XaviX Tennis. Each takes the form of a cartridge and peripherals to simulate the game. The system doesn't boast very impressive specs, but offers a fairly novel range of games. The device's design team includes former developers of the Nintendo Entertainment System.





Gigabyte has released a new graphics card powered by NVidia's GeForce FX5950 Ultra chip. It carries 256 MB of 256-bit memory, is clocked at 520MHz and supports VIVO and TwinView. The games

Gigabyte GV-N595U-GT using GeForce FX 5950 Ultra

bundle is quite impressive, featuring Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield and Arx Fatalis.



Technology News from the other side

by iwan pienaar

Shure E3c sound isolating earphones



Shure Incorporated has been manufacturing professionalgrade audio equipment for 80 years, and are now bringing their quality of sound reproduction to the mobile audiophile. These stylish earphones make use of Shure's sound isolating technology, and ship with a set of interchangeable sleeves in order to fit anybody's ears comfortably. Unlike most noisecancelling ear- and headphones, the E3c earphones don't compromise sound quality while excluding outside environmental noise. www.shure.com

New AIWA USB audio and digital cameras





Sony has released new products under the Aiwa brand. The AZ-C7 is a digital camera boasting a resolution of 2 megapixels and built-in flash. The AZ-RM256 is a portable MP3 player with 256 MB capacity; music is uploaded to it with USB2.0.

ASUS Terminator 2 barebones systems



ASUSTeK has released two new barebones systems, the T2-P and T2-R. They are designed as complete multimedia systems, including TV tuner and FM antenna and tuner. Using Intel Socket 478, the systems can support processors up to P4 3.4GHz. The P4P8T motherboard can accommodate up to 2 GB of RAM ranging from PC1600 to PC3200. It features the Intel 865G chipset with onboard ATI Radeon 9100 64MB graphics and onboard 6-channel AC97 sound. Networking capabilities include 10/100 Mbps wired and wireless 802.11b WiFi. A multipurpose card reader is also included, which can read any current type of data card. www.corex.co.za

Prime networking products in SA

Esquire Technologies has begun importing and distributing Prime's range of networking products locally. These include a complete range of 54Mbps wireless 802.11g devices and gigabit LAN switches ranging from 4- to 24-port models. www.esquire.co.za



NASA BETS ON NVIDIA FOR MARS

While ATI might be leading the stakes in the graphics card market, rival nVidia is assisting the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in recreating the surface

NASA is using transmitted data from the rover Spirit that landed on Mars in January to reconstruct the planet surface as a photo-realistic virtual reality. This can in turn be used to plan and rehearse upcoming rover missions. "NVidia technology allows NASA to visualise the Martian terrain in photo-realistic virtual reality, enhancing scientists' understanding of the environment and streamlining analysis," says Laurence Edwards, Mars team lead for 3D visualisation and surface reconstruction at NASA. "With this capability, scientists step into a visually engaging model of the planet's surface and interactively study multiple perspectives. NASA can simulate the lighting and surface conditions expected on Mars when an experiment is to be conducted. If a rock will cast a shadow, obscuring a feature of interest, scientists on the ground will know about this effect in advance and plan around it." That might be all well and good, but will nVidia be able to give a decent performance when Half-Life 2 comes out?

CUBE TO GET PENGUIN?

A group of programmers are working to get the Linux open source software working on the Nintendo GameCube video game console.

The group has already released a program called Linuxpreview on the Cube that draws an on-screen picture of the Linux penguin. While Nintendo has not officially commented on this news, previous attempts by programmers to get Linux working on the Microsoft Xbox console were met by scorn from the software behemoth. However, Sony is officially endorsing Linux efforts for its PlayStation 2 (PS2) console. It is also offering a \$199 kit on its Web site featuring a keyboard, hard drive, network adapter and software that will be able to convert a PS2 into a Linux computer.

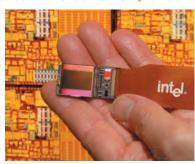
'CTRLALTDELETE' INVENTOR RESTARTS CAREER

David Bradley, an engineer at IBM, spent five minutes writing the computer code that has bailed out the world's PC users for decades, writes Associated Press. The result was one of the most well known, if not much maligned, key combinations around, Ctrl + Alt + Delete. "I didn't know it was going to be a cultural icon," said Bradley. "I did a lot of other things than Ctrl + Alt + Delete, but I'm famous for that one."

Bradley retired from IBM in January after spending almost thirty years with the company. He was one of 12 engineers working to create the IBM PC. At a 20-year celebration for the IBM PC, Bradley was on a panel with Microsoft founder Bill Gates and other technology icons. The discussion turned to the keys. "I may have invented it, but Bill made it famous," Bradley said.

Needless to say, Gates was not amused.

Intel's consumer electronics plans



Last year Intel focused on wireless technology as its main marketing thrust. This year the company plans to push just as aggressively into consumer electronics, with the primary focus being new chips for high-definition televisions, as well as an all-in-one home entertainment PC. The company is also investing US\$200 million into companies involved with technologies enabling media sharing within a household. Intel's Entertainment PCs will feature a "10-foot interface", allowing users to sit back and control the functions, without being required to sit right up in front of the machine.

Philips KEY019 digital camcorder



Philips will soon introduce the KEY019 compact digital camcorder, which is about the size of a cigarette lighter or lipstick container. It boasts a resolution of 2 megapixels and a micro-display to allow users to aim it accurately. It can record 24 minutes of MPEG4 video, and can double up as a digital camera, MP3 player or data storage device, using USB for data transfers. It will become available in Mav.

Soltek branches out to ATI GPUs



Soltek, formerly only manufacturing graphics cards with NVidia chips, has revealed its first ATI-based cards. The company opted, on this first enterprise, for the lower-end ATI chips, and so the cards are based on the Radeon 9200 SE and Radeon 9600 SE GPUs. They carry a standard set of features, including a comprehensive set of interfaces.

2003 Gaming sales report

billion last year, with console and portable system games contributing 5.8 billion to that figure. The overall trend was one of growth. Another observed trend was a decline in sales of mature titles, with all-ages and teen-rated titles leading.

Philips 855



Philips will launch its latest fancy phone, the 855, in June. Besides the usual list of impressive features and gadgets, the phone will be able to output pictures it takes to a TV. It will also sport a full suite of firmware including an Email client, and two displays.

Games software sales exceeded US\$7

Digivox T-IV MP3 player

Another new portable MP3 player is available, this time from Digivox. The T-IV supports the usual range of audio formats, including MP3, ASF and WMA, can be obtained in capacities ranging from 32 MB through to 512 MB, and boasts variable encoding bitrates. Although using only a single AA battery, it can run for a full day. It also features a built-in FM tuner and the ability to capture MP3 from radio broadcasts. An unusual feature is voice-activated operation. As with many such devices, it can be used as a portable storage medium, and interfaces with a PC via USB.

Logitech PS2 force feedback



Logitech has released its Flight Force Feedback Joystick, previously available for PC, for the PlayStation 2. The unit features a key layout that is aimed at console users, but is still designed predominantly with flight simulator fans in mind.



Although MiniDisc isn't big in this country, nevertheless Sony's new Walkman is of some interest. It makes use of the new Hi-MD technology, which is of higher capacity than regular MiniDiscs, and is versatile in that it allows recording at various bitrates, thus allowing the user to choose between capacity and audio fidelity. One Hi-MD disc can hold up to 45 hours of music, at the lowest available bitrate of 48 kbps. The device is also backward-compatible with standard MiniDiscs, and able to compress up to 13 hours of music onto a standard 80 minute disc. The Walkman can also be used as a standard data storage device, connecting to the PC via a USB cable. A single AA battery will power the unit for up to 30 hours.

Sony Hi-MD Walkman

techWATCH











NINTENDO SEES DOUBLE

The big news of the month is undoubtedly Nintendo announcing the GBA DS, a new take on the popular handheld; now sporting two vertical screens instead of the standard one (as well as two internal processors). The news came after the company's President, Saturo Iwata, revealed the concept to Japanese press. What's the point of two screens? Nintendo's press release gives it in a nutshell: "Players will no longer be forced to interrupt game play to shift perspective, such as moving from a wide shot to a close up, or alternating between a character's ongoing battle and a map of their environment" Yes, that makes sense. After all, one of the things we at NAG have always hated were the constant flipping through view modes while playing GBA games. It kept us awake at nights.

So far not much else is known. Reports seem to indicate that the handheld will use flash cards, similar to the Nintendo iQue device (only released in China), but backwards compatibility for GBA games has been hinted at. While the DS won't be similar to this portable N64 console, it does seem to hint towards similar territory.

But Nintendo needs a stronger footing in the west and not everyone there is very adamant about the new hardware, with only one eastern third-party publisher developing something for it. Even EA mentioned that they are taking a "wait and see' approach with the DS (and in the same breath pledging games for the Sony PSP). Some industry folk criticized Nintendo for planning another platform 'for the fans' instead of a device with mainstream appeal (something the company needs if they want to remain being taken serious in the coming years).

Of course, these things are all on paper. The DS will be revealed at E3 and then we'll know what to expect. That is if the PSP doesn't steal its thunder when it gets unveiled as well...



Sony Wireless DVD Dream System

Sony's new DAV-FR10W wireless DVD system is a home theatre solution featuring Digital Infrared Audio Transmission that doesn't suffer from cell-phone or WiFi interference. This means that the rear speakers can be set up anywhere without the need to run long, inconvenient cables all over the room.



ViewSonic has released a range of HDTV/monitor hybrids. The N3000w and its bigger brother the N3020w are 30-inch LCD displays capable of 1280x768 high-definition TV or up 1280x1024 VGA resolutions. The higher-end version is functionally similar, but has higher aesthetic appeal and detachable speakers.

ViewSonic LCD TV displays

Agua PlayStation 2

Sony will be launching a limited edition Aqua PS2 console in March. Additional accessories, such as a vertical stand and memory card will also be available separately whilst the console will ship with a Dualshock 2 Analog controller in aqua.



BenO DJ Station

Local distributor Drive Control has launched BenQ's DJ Station, the first design-inspired series of CD/R (CD-Recorder Disk) media from BenQ. The DJ Station LP disks have a funky retro design resembling a mini LP and are available in tangy orange, gecko green, funky purple and crystal blue.

tech news:

Gaming exercise machine



Yet another gaming peripheral whose aim it is to make gaming more physical is the Powergrid kiloWatt. Rather than concentrating on cardiovascular aspects, this unit is designed to build muscle. In essence, it is a glorified Dual Shock 2 controller, but is much larger and allows its user to specify a degree of resistance to movements. Different motions work different parts of the body. The kiloWatt is supposed to work with virtually any game, but so far all demonstrations and examples given were carried out with racing games, which it appears to be particularly suited to.



Creative Zen Portable Media Center

Creative have launched a funky portable entertainment device. You can play video, music and pictures that are transferred from your computer, including Windows Media Video, Windows Media Audio, Windows Media Image, MP3, JPEG and TIFF files. With a 20GB hard drive it can hold up to 87 hours of video, over 300 hours of music or 50,000 pictures with all disk drive space dedicated to either video, audio, or pictures.



This sporty watch makes use of Smart Personal Objects Technology, and links to Microsoft's MSN Direct service, which is available in some major North American cities. The watch is water-resistant to a depth of 100m, and can receive news broadcasts from MSN Direct, as well as instant messages sent from MSN Messenger 6.0. The subscribed service also keeps the watch's time synchronised to the correct time kept on a MSN Direct server. The watch can be recharged by means of a mains adapter or USB cable.

Crystal Xbox

Microsoft has planned the launch of a limited-edition version of the Xbox for the European market. The system will sport a clear crystal finish, and is scheduled for release on the 14th of this month.



High-end digital wireless speakers

The J9618B digital wireless speaker set is now available from Corex. This set comes with a very comprehensive feature set, including palm-sized remote control and 2.4GHz wireless audio transmission to rear speakers. For more information, visit www.corex.co.za



Gigabyte Router

Gigabytes new wireless VPN router, the GN-BR404W, is intended for mid- and small businesses. GN-BR404W supports 802.11g, 64/128/152-bit WEP encryption, 802.1x authentification and authorization. It has 1 x WAN port and 4 x LAN ports and can be connected to other similar routers via Extended Distribution Wireless System.









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pc news:

Miami Vice

Davilex has secured the rights to publish a game based on the 80s TV series Miami Vice. The game is in development at Atomic Planet in the UK, and is expected to be ready near the end of the year for PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2.

Silent Hunter III

The third installment of UbiSoft's Silent Hunter submarine simulation series has been scheduled for release late this year. This new title will boast a dynamic weather system, as well as a new 3D engine.

Marvel Games

Comic book publisher Marvel has set up a games development division. Games will be based on Marvel products, and the company already has deals running with Activision, Vivendi Universal, THQ and Encore.

SimCity 5 rumours

Rumours in Europe have it that development of SimCity 5 has begun. However, Maxis has officially denied these, and so time will tell what the actual situation truly is.

EA games delayed

Electronic Arts has announced that, for quality control reasons, The Sims 2 and Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault have both been delayed, and will be released no earlier than July.

Driver 3 delayed

Atari's upcoming Driver 3 has been delayed for the second time; this time, it has been rescheduled from March to early June. The game will be available on PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2, the GameCube version having been cancelled last September.

Star Wars: Republic Commando



Lucas Arts expects to have Star Wars: Republic Commando ready sometime this year. The firstperson shooter will be powered by a version of the Unreal engine.

Chaos League

Cyanide Studio has announced Chaos League, which is a rather bizarre blend of sport, real-time strategy and roleplaying. The game revolves around managing and effectively using a team of nine players who play an odd version of football that includes combat and magic spells. The game is planned for release in a few months.





Eidos has announced that Thief: Deadly Shadows is in development at Ion Storm. The game will continue the story of Garrett on PC and Xbox late this year. The new instalment will include a thirdperson view in addition to the traditional firstperson perspective, allowing greater control of the character. The game will boast a dynamic lighting and shadow engine that will allow and require players to influence and make use of lighting conditions in order to hide successfully.

MiniOne Racing



A new French games developer has announced its first title, MiniOne Racing, which will have players racing well-armed miniature cars around tracks in very varied environments. The game will support a split-screen mode for two players, as well as LAN and Internet multiplayer modes. At this point, no completion date has been specified.

FS Falcon 2004



Just Flight's FS Falcon 2004 is an add-on pack for Microsoft's Flight Simulator 2002/2004 and Combat Flight Simulator 3, and focuses on the F-16 Fighting Falcon. The expansion pack should be obtainable as you read this.this year under the direction of Empire Interactive.





Space Invaders!

Space Invaders '95, for the PC, and Space Invaders Anniversary, for the PlayStation 2, will be published by Empire Interactive. Both titles are expected later this year. The games will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Taito, the company that first developed Space Invaders, and will feature multiple play modes, including two-player modes.

Angels vs. Devils



Angels vs. Devils, from Enigma Software, is a 3D action game revolving around a conflict between these celestial and infernal factions. The story's basic premise is that mankind have become indifferent to heaven and hell, and their representatives now strife with each other in an attempt to become conspicuous and thus sway people. Characters in this game earn experience, gaining various powers. A variety of multiplayer modes is available. The game is already available in Russia, and will be released in other countries soon.

Juiced

Juiced, in development at Juice Games (their first game, perhaps?), is yet another driving game based on the current fad of street racing. The developers boast the usual sorts of numbers: "over 50 licensed vehicles" and countless "authentic" (in a simulation?) aftermarket



parts. The interesting fact is that the game will feature a "crew-based" team mode, which is novel. The game is scheduled for release late this year for PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox, and will be published by Acclaim.

The Guy Game

A company by the name of Top Heavy Studios is currently working on a trivia game for mature audiences entitled The Guy Game. The game is a pretty ordinary trivia game, with the exception that the rewards for

answering correctly are video clips of women exposing their breasts. The game will also include the rules for a drinking game that is quite popular in the States, as well as several mini-games. The game will be released on PC and an asyet undisclosed console, but currently lacks a publisher, so no release date is known.



pc news:

Nemesis of the Roman Empire

Nemesis of the Roman Empire, from Haemimont Games, is a follow-up to Celtic Kings: Rage of War, although not in a story-line sense. Making use of an enhanced version of the same engine, this new title explores the Punic Wars, which took place over two thousand years ago and involved Rome and Carthage as the main contenders, and sucking in the Gauls and Iberians as well. The game includes real-time strategy and roleplaying elements. As you read this, it should already be available.

Championship Manager 5

Eidos has formed a new development team, which has been charged with the task of developing Championship Manager 5. The majority of the staff is highly experienced in producing soccer themed computer games. The game is expected to be ready by around mid-year.

Half-Life 2 further delayed

Valve has announced a further delay to the release date of its eagerly awaited shooter Half-Life 2. Originally scheduled for release at the end of last September, it was postponed till Christmas, then again to April this year. As matters currently stand, Half-Life 2 is now expected to be ready around the middle of the year.

Computer game-inspired movies

German film production company Boll KG has acquired the rights to Fear Effect from Eidos. The company favours computer game themes in its projects, having produced House of the Dead and being currently involved in production of Alone in the Dark. The company is also at work on a film version of Microsoft's Dungeon Siege, with prolific scriptwriter David Freeman behind the film's story.

New Prince of Persia

UbiSoft's Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is set to get a sequel. The project was recently announced, and no release details are available at present.

The Fall: Last Days of Gaia



The Fall: Last Days of Gaia from Silver Style Entertainment is a post-apocalyptic role-playing game for the PC that is still very much in development, which is to say that no release date has been suggested yet. The above-mentioned "apocalypse" is not the standard nuclear one, but has resulted in a similar state of affairs for planet Earth. The basic premise is quite reminiscent of Mad Max movies, with gangs roaming the land squabbling over resources, and the player being motivated by a revenge disguised as justice.

Soldiers: Heroes of World War II



Codemasters has acquired publishing rights to this game from 1C Company, the leading Russian games publisher. The title, developed by Ukrainian company Best Way, is a blend of realtime strategy and action. The action will play out in a cinematic fashion, and the missions are based on the exploits of various British, American, German and Russian World War II heroes. The environment is fully destructible, the penetration physics simulate the exact properties of the ammunition being used, and the missions will be free-form enough to allow multiple ways to complete them. Soldiers should be finished and ready for release late this year.



American McGee movie

A film trilogy based on American McGee's Oz is currently in development. The involved parties are Walt Disney Pictures, Jerry Bruckheimer Films and Carbon 6, which is American McGee's company. Although the game is scheduled for release sometime this year, the first of the films will take two to three years to complete.



Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizon



This year will see the release of two expansion packs for CDV's Blitzkrieg. The first should be emerging in a couple of months' time, while the second will appear toward the end of the year. Blitzkrieg II is scheduled for release early next year. Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizon will include an 18-mission campaign centered on the exploits of German General Erwin Rommel. The expansion pack will also include eight additional single player missions that feature Japan and the war in the Pacific. The expansion will include 50 additional units, including Japanese Zero fighter aircraft, American M5 Stuart light reconnaissance tanks, and new infantry units such as the U.S. Marines and German Afrika Korps.

The Stalin Subway



G5 Software is developing The Stalin Subway, a realistic first-person shooter set in early 1950s Moscow during the time of Stalin's regime. The game will feature authentically emulated weapons, including some fairly rare and exotic ones, an interactive environment and emotionally responsive non-player characters. The game will be published by Buka, but as yet a release date has not been established.

Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars

Hungarian company Mithis Interactive is finishing up production of Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars, a humorous turn-based combat strategy game. The game will feature a single-player campaign, as well as multiple LAN and online multiplayer modes. It will be published by Cenega Publishing within the next couple of months.





console news:

Gran Turismo 4 delayed

GT4, in development at Polyphony Digital, which had previously been scheduled for release within the next couple of months, is now expected to be released in July or August.

Knight Rider 2

A sequel to Knight Rider - The Game is on its way to PC and PlayStation 2 from Davilex Games, and is expected to be ready toward the end of the year.

TimeSplitters 3

Electronic Arts and Free Radical Design have signed an agreement for the next TimeSplitters game. Little is currently known, except for the fact that it will be released next year and will feature online play.

Sega news

Sega's upcoming Virtua Fighter Cyber Generation is being aimed at younger gamers. Virtua Fighter 5, which is also in the works at present, should satisfy older fans of the series. There is speculation, currently, about the possibility of Outrun 2 being ported to Xbox.

Vets set up new studio

Former senior staff from Blizzard Entertainment and Naughty Dog have set up a new console game development studio, called Ready At Dawn Studios. The founders have previously been involved with high profile titles such as Jak II, Diablo II and various StarCraft and WarCraft III products.

Combat Elite

Acclaim will release Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers in June, to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the D-Day landing in Normandy.





Konami 2004 Line Un

Konami has been renamed to Konami Digital Entertainment, and intends to expand into various entertainment genres including movies. The company has announced several of its upcoming titles for this year. Nanobreaker will be a shooter, its story tied to a nanotech research facility whose computer goes haywire and starts transforming citizens into killer cyborgs. The game is being developed for PlayStation 2. The company is also at work on Suikoden IV, also for PlayStation 2, a role-playing title set in an archipelago which will feature naval travel and a host of characters. A female wrestling title is on its way to PlayStation 2, titled WWX: Rumble Rose, featuring a system that reflects a character's behaviour in the character's visual appearance and fighting style. Rumble Rose will be released around May. Other titles to be released this year include: Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes, Neo Contra, Silent Hill 4: The Room, Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim, Dance Revolution Extreme and Gradius V.









Pokemon news

Nintendo is broadening its Pokemon line of games with three new titles, at least. Pocket Monster: Fire Red and Pocket Monster: Leaf Green are upcoming remakes of the first Pokemon releases, Pocket Monster: Red and Pocket Monster: Green, respectively. These new titles will be able to interact with Pokemon Ruby and Pokemon Sapphire, as well as Pokemon Colosseum. This last is scheduled for release on the GameCube on 21 November, and will be a Pokemon title with a role-play element.

Metroid: Zero Mission

April should see the European release of Metroid: Zero Mission, a reproduction of Nintendo's classic title for NES. The game will boast some new features, in order to appease modern audiences.





The Incredibles

THQ will publish a game based on Pixar's upcoming movie The Incredibles, which is due to be released at the same time as the movie on 5 November. The movie is about a family of once-famous superheroes who are forced into the Witness Protection Program after they are sued by the victims they have saved. After several sedentary years posing as a typically dysfunctional suburban family, they are called back to fight a supervillain unconcerned with litigious civilians.

Battlefield 1942 for Xbox



Battlefield 1942 is on its way to the Xbox. Furthermore, rumour has it that EA's new range of Xbox sports titles my feature Xbox Live support, suggesting that EA and Microsoft's dispute in this regard may be reaching resolution.

Darkwatch



Darkwatch: Curse of the West has been announced by Sammy Studios. The game will ship for Xbox and PlayStation 2 late this year, and will be a first-person shooter blending a wild west theme with one of vampire horror.



scores, charts and release dates:

PC Web Scores

Title	NAG	gamespy.com	gamespot.com	pc.ign.com
Broken Sword	91	4	8.1	8.4
Star Wars KOTOR	86	5	8.8	9
Silent Hill 2	89	86	6.2	8.4
Beyond Good and Evil	81	-	8.3	9
The Simpsons Hit and Run	79	4	8	8.1













Console Web Scores

Title	NAG	ign.com	gamespot.com	gamespy.com
Manhunt [PS2]	85	8.5	8.4	4
MOH Rising Sun [PS2]	68	8	6.4	2
The Sims Bustin' Out [PS2]	79	8	8.3	4
Secret Weapons [PS2]	80	8	6.9	4
Dragon Ball Z [GCN]	61	6.4	6.9	3
Pokemon Channel [GCN]	79	5	5.4	1

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CHARTS

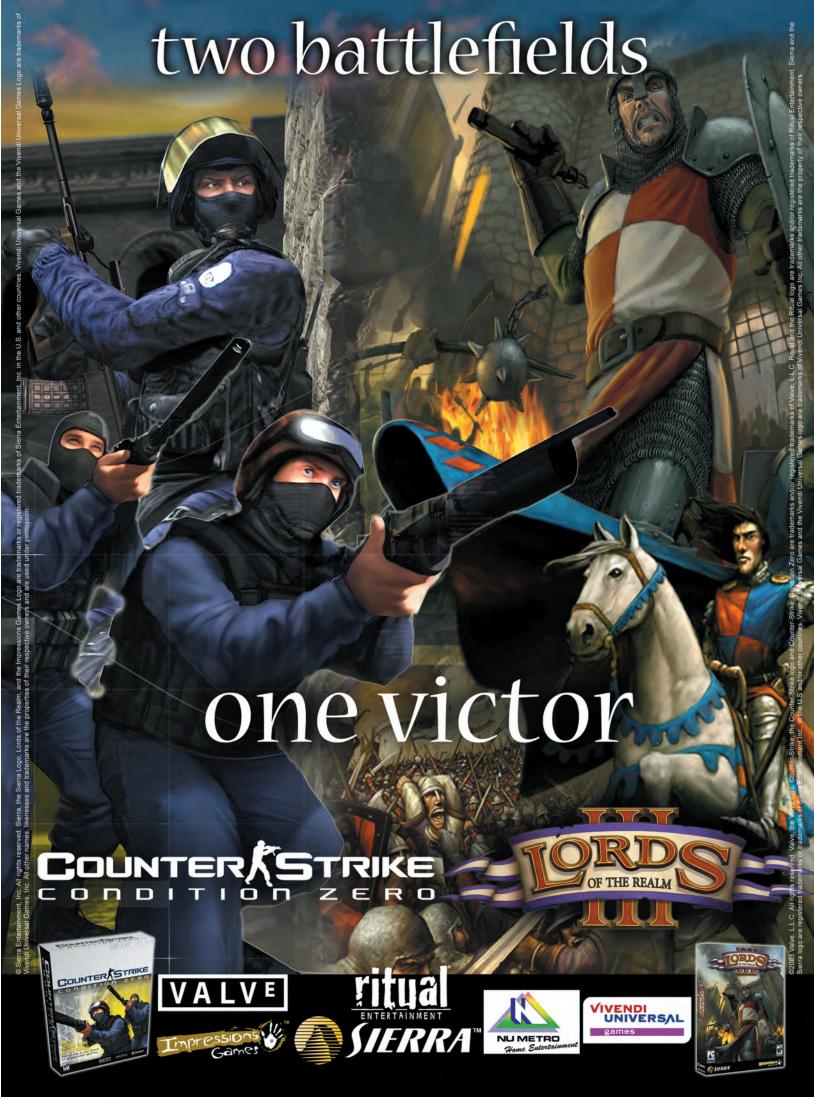
1	PS2	Need for Speed Underground
2	PS2	GTA III & Vice City Double Pack
3	PC	Need for Speed Underground
4	PS2	Crash Bandicoot 5
5	PS2	WWE Here Comes the Pain
6	PS2	Cricket 2004
7	PS2	Dragonball Z Budokai 2
8	PS2	WWE Shut Your Mouth Platinum
9	PC	Sims Makin' Magic
10	PS2	Medal of Honor Rising Sun
11	PS2	LOTR: Return of the King
12	PS2	Tony Hawk Underground
13	PC	Cricket 2004
14	PS2	Spyro Enter the Dragon
15	PS2	The Getaway Platinum
16	PS2	True Crime Streets of LA
17	PS2	Tekken 4 Platinum
18	PS2	Sims Bustin' Out
19	PS2	Pro Evolution Soccer 3
20	PS2	Splinter Cell Platinum

Chart information supplied by Musica for the period 1-31 January 2004

Selecten International	PU Kelease Da	ites
FireStarter	FPS	March 2
Shadow Vault	Strategy	March 2
Dead Man's Hand	FPS	March 2
Gangland	Strategy	March 3
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	Tactical	March 4
Painkiller	FPS	March 9
kill.switch	Action	March 9
City of Heroes	MMORPG	March 14
Black 9	Action	March 16
Unreal Tournament 2004	FPS	March 16
Battlefield Vietnam	Action	March 22
Breed	FPS	March 23
Knights of the Temple	Action	March 23
Sam & Max Freelance Police	Adventure	March 23
Earth 2160	Strategy	March 23
Stunts: Final Stage	Racing	March 23
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Tactical	March 23
Far Cry	FPS	March 24
I of the Dragon	RPG	March 24
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	FPS	March 25
Syberia II	Adventure	March 26
Soldner: Secret Wars	Strategy	March 31
The Egyptian Prophecy	Adventure	April 1
Alias	Action	April 6
Half-Life 2	FPS	April 27
Hitman 3: Contracts	Action	April 27

Selected International Console Release Dates

Cy Girls	PS2	Action	March 9
Firefighter F.D. 18	PS2	Action	March 9
IHRA Drag Racing 2004	PS2	Driving	March 9
Naval Ops: Commander	PS2	Simulation	March 9
PBA Bowling 2004	PS2	Sports	March 9
The Suffering	PS2 Xbox	Action	March 9
X-Files: Resist or Serve	PS2	Adventure	March 9
A Sound of Thunder	GBA	Action	March 16
Ghost Master	PS2	Strategy	March 18
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	GC	Role-Playing	March 18
Ice Nine	GBA	Action	March 18
Little League Baseball	GBA	Sports	March 18
MLB 2005	PS2	Sports	March 18
Road Trip: Arcade Edition	GC	Driving	March 18
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	GC PS2 Xbox	Action	March 18
Sitting Ducks	PS2 Xbox GBA	Adventure	March 18
The Cat in the Hat	GBA PS	Action	March 18
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	PS2	Action	March 18
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Xbox PS2 GC	Action	March 18
Trivial Pursuit Unhinged	Xbox PS2	Puzzle	March 18
Wade Hixton's Counter Punch	GBA	Sports	March 18
World Championship Pool 2004	PS2 GC	Sports	March 18
All-Star Baseball 2005	PS2	Sports	March 23
DRIV3R	PS2 Xbox	Action	March 24
ESPN Major League Baseball	PS2 Xbox	Sports	March 24
Fight Night 2004	PS2 Xbox	Sports	March 24





future perfect console for tomorrow.

The world has changed more since 2000 than most people know. Sony made gaming cool with the Play-Station 2, Microsoft proved





PlayStation 3 - the 4th place?

t's harder to stay at number one than to become a number one. But unlike a normal race, in the console wars, Sony has a vast advantage over its competitors, thanks to the legacies of the PSOne and PlayStation 2. Now the PlayStation 3 is poised to give the company the chance to act on lessons learned

with the PlayStation 2.

Sony not only popularized 3D gaming with the PSOne, it dragged gaming into the mainstream with the PS2. This alone means that the PlayStation 3 will have a much stronger launch line-up than the PS2 had. But the real change between the two will be the leap in hardware. The PlayStation 2 is around 300 times more powerful

than the PSOne, but it still ended up being the least impressive of the three consoles when it came to graphics. While this didn't prevent it from being a wildly popular console, it was a thorn in Sony's side. But with the new Cell chip technology, currently being co-developed by Sony, IBM and Toshiba at a cost of \$400 million, the PlayStation 3 will be far more powerful, some speculating as much as a thousand that of the PS2.

Cell in itself is quite a marvel. Based on IBM's PowerPC technology (the same technology Microsoft has employed for their chip concept for Xbox Next), the PS3 might contain up to four of these chips. At the 2002 Game Developers Conference, Sony Chief Technical Officer Shin'ichi Okamoto showed a diagram of a project at Sony called the GScube - sixteen PlayStation 2 consoles wired together, working together to power a single display output. While Okamoto-san admitted that this design is a bit too complicated, it did demonstrate what Cell eventually was revealed to be – chips within a chip capable of parallel computing. To cut through technical jargon, Cell will be able to do more than 1 trillion calculations a second, making it more powerful than 100 2.5 Ghz Pentium 4 chips. And to add to that awesome number, Cell might be capable of harnessing idle time over networks or the Internet which means several PlayStation 3s can work together towards a bigger

Of course, Sony have made some really outrageous claims in the past. But stories



such as what PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi said about the PlayStation 2's potential back in 2000 (likening it with being able to plug into the Matrix and enter a cyber world) are not making a re-appearance with the new console. Sony have remained tight-lipped over what exactly the PlayStation 3 will be capable of doing and apart from the hardware specs (which obviously open a lot of room for speculation) little has been revealed. This is because Sony has a far more comfortable position than its competitors in leading the console race at a comfortable 5:1 ratio. But there are a few things that can be taken into consideration.

Firstly, media content delivery and online content is as important to Sony's strategy as it is to Microsoft. In fact, even early into the lifespan of the PlayStation 2 the company remarked that this will be the future of game consoles. The PSX is already an indication

This concept of the Play-Station 3 might not be that far off, since consoles will be more design-conscious to fit in with other living room luxuries





"We are finding a new way for people to have social experiences. Robbie Bach, Xbox CO, on Xbox Live

that Sony is using its game console technology to create a new home user market where Internet access, movies, music and other entertainment services all happen in one place – your living room – using one piece of hardware connected to your television. The possibility of email and instant messaging on the PlayStation 3 has already been mentioned. It's also safe to speculate that the console will be backwards compatible, some reports suggesting this going as far back as PSOne games. And with Sony integrating memory stick support into the PSP and PSX, this will also probably feature in the PS3. The PSP is the one to watch though, even if

you are interested in the PlayStation 3, since the two will likely be compatible with each other, not unlike the Gameboy Advance and GameCube. While Sony have spoken a lot about the new handheld unit, they are not mentioning how it might tie in with the PS3. But data swapping, at least, is a sure feature. It's also quite likely that Sony will go the Nintendo route and encourage link-up scenarios. If the PSP is going to be the walkman of the 21st century, complete with music and movie support, the opportunities are vast when you bring the two consoles together.

Online gaming will be a major factor in Sony's strategy since Cell has been designed with the online world and broadband in mind. Microsoft have made considerable gains using their Live service and Sony are eyeing the

same territory. The standoff between Microsoft and
Electronic Arts over online
play also indicates that the
market wants another online
player and Sony is most apt
to take that role. The Eyetoy
is one area that the company
might exploit to compete with
Microsoft's voice communication,
since it is essentially a webcam,
but this

will happen well before the PlayStation 3 is launched. Voice communication will also feature on the PS3, unless Sony figures no-one likes communicating online.

Sony has the comfortable position of market dominance and confidence, so they don't have to launch before the other consoles. Their role as a consumer electronics firm will also give them an advantage over Microsoft when it comes to home entertainment. At this stage of the race it's not a question of Sony doing something wrong but rather ignoring an area that will cause Microsoft to gain market share. But until the PSP launches in November, Sony isn't prepared to steal from the little handheld-s marketing thunder by talking about the PlayStation 3 – at least not until they start discussing cross-platform features.

What's Next for the Xbox?

o-one can accuse Microsoft of having it easy in the past four years. Since unveiling the Xbox at GDC 2000, the company not only had to fight off its public stigma (probably most popularly summed up in the phrase 'Micro\$oft') but it also sunk millions upon million of dollars into the development and promotion of the console, which still is making a loss, not to mention selling their vision to the share holders.

But the Xbox was a bold and necessary move into the entertainment market that Microsoft has always been eager to be a part of. Media delivering is a big part of their home strategy, something that is very

obvious when you look at products such as Media Player, DirectX and the MSN Network. As of yet, Microsoft have remained

As of yet, Microsoft have remained pretty tight-lipped about the tentatively named Xbox Next, because it obviously wouldn't





Xbox hacking has been a big embarrassment for Microsoft and was probably one of the reasons that prompted them towards IBM's PowerPC technology

want to show off its hand before Sony does. But the Japanese console leader isn't in the same position as Microsoft and Nintendo as far as establishing with the public that they will be able to perform in the next wave of the

There are certain things that can already be taken for granted with the Xbox 2. The first is that it will not be a pure gaming console, allowing for streaming of video and music content, something Sony has also speculated towards early into their revelations on the PS3. Live will also have a big impact on the market, since Microsoft have certainly carved out a niche for themselves here, leading the market, despite Sony currently outselling them with Broadband kits. But Sony's online service, unlike Live, has been criticized to be unstable, rushed and lacking a decent range of titles to support it.

Live is set to stay, since the company plans to extend their membership to 1 million users by June. Live opened a major area in online gaming, as Robbie Bach, Chief Xbox Officer, said at the recent Consumer Electronics Show: "The essence of what's happening here is that we are finding a new way for people to have social experiences. We are blazing new trails. The business model is new. The concept model is new. The genre of content is new. This is all green field."

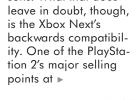
Information becomes more speculative, though, when you start investigating the hardware that will power the Xbox Next. Here are still a few facts to rely on, though. Firstly, Microsoft has foregone their relationship with NVIDIA (one that has been under considerable strain for a while) to choosing rival ATI instead. They also signed deals with IBM and SIS to develop custom chip designs. The

most important change in their approach, though, is that the Xbox Next will be much closer to a console than its predecessor. While the original console uses components from various manufacturers that are not that different from the PC versions of the same hardware (most infamously the Nforce technology found on the Xbox main board), Microsoft are commissioning custom designs from the licensed manufacturers. This has two advantages for Microsoft

- the ability to create hybrid systems and more importantly the ability to streamline the hardware performance and getting it to do exactly what they want it to do. So it's no surprise that the Redmond company is far more involved in the actual design process. "It is clear that Microsoft wants to get a lot more of their DNA into it," said Richard Doherty, director of research company

The Envisioneering Group, adding another interesting point, "They sure don't want to have another situation where an Xbox can be turned into a PC."

Apart from the new graphics chipset, the other important departure from the current console is leaving Intel's x.86 chipset and instead using IBM's PowerPC technology, found in Apple computers. IBM has also been developing the Cell chip with Sony for the PS3, but that has been in R&D since 2001, so it's moot trying to make performance comparisons. What that does





"Mario will never start shooting hookers" Nintendo President Saturo Iwata



Future Perfect - Building the Perfect Console for Tomorrow



By mid 2004, Sony will have sold over 34 million PlayStation 2s in the US, while Microsoft is looking at around 20 million Xbox units and Nintendo can expect 18 million. This gives the PS3 a large homefield advantage in both brand support and industry clout, perhaps forcing both the N5 and Xbox Next to launch as soon as possible.

Source: International Development Group

launch was that it had access to the PlayStation's catalogue of games. Nintendo has the same advantage with the successor to the GameCube and it is arguable that the GCN's lack of support for the N64 cartridge games hurt sales in the beginning.

But a radical departure from the original Xbox might be what the console needs to ensure it becomes a player equivalent to the PlayStation consoles. Molding the new Xbox into a bona fide console could also help Microsoft break into the very elusive Japanese market, not to mention avoiding the embarrassing incidents of groups hacking the Xbox. The other problem the console struck in the land of the rising sun is its size. While American gamers seem to like, or at least not dislike, the Xbox's sheer bulk, Japanese crowds were not as adamant, possibly indicating a major departure in the look of the Xbox. One troubling rumour has been that the Xbox Next will not have a hard drive, which is drawing some criticism already, since the hard drive is one of the most innovative features the Xbox introduced to consoles, especially with downloadable content for games from online services. Regardless, though, Japan is going to be a major factor in Microsoft's approach with the new console. Not only will it encourage more Japanese developers to work on the console, but it will also take on Sony and Nintendo in their home markets, something Microsoft needs to achieve if they plan to be a major player in the console market.

The good news is that we'll all have a much clearer idea later this year at GDC 2004, where Microsoft plans to unveil the Xbox Next (as well as its final name). In the mean time, we'll let Bill Gates have the final word, "In terms of the next round, hey it's a new game. We're not showing our hand and I don't think



N5 - Nintendo's next generation

ery little is known about Nintendo's next console, other than that they are making one. In fact, when opening his speech at Nintendo's presentation during E3 2003, President Saturo Iwata said that Nintendo is here to stay in the hardware race. And that's pretty much a given when you consider the phenomenal success of the Gameboy Advance. But the GameCube has had a lukewarm reception in the market, causing a lot of petty number fighting between it and the Xbox. Some blame Nintendo's stubborn approach not to conform more to market trends, such as releasing their games on multi platforms or embracing online gaming. Whatever the cause of their problems is, Nintendo needs to have a big hit with the next console or they might bow out of the console hardware race. If it can happen to Sega it can happen to anyone.

Tentatively called the N5 (being the fifth Nintendo console), officially little has been confirmed. IBM and ATI are continuing their partnerships with Nintendo, developing chipsets for the next console, which sparked some rumours that the Xbox Next and N5 might be more similar than thought before. Microsoft is also employing the two companies to develop technology for them and although both MS and Nintendo have different ideas of what they want, neither have been developing their chips as long as Sony has. Plus, Sony made a big investment with IBM and Toshiba to develop their Cell chip so it's unlikely that they'd want their competitors to use the same architecture. What is known is that all of the consoles will use PowerPC-based technology. The mini-discs are also likely to stay, both because ensuring backward compatibility is a move Nintendo wouldn't risk getting wrong, plus it still gives them control over the manufacturing process not to mention staves off piracy. And linking with the GBA (or perhaps even the mysterious new technology that will be unveiled at E3 2004) can also be expected. Beyond that everyone has been left to speculate. Nintendo have often said that they make games and gaming machines, on queue referring to the fact that the company has sold over one billion games in its lifetime. But this distinction has not helped the Game-Cube (or the N64 for that matter) to compete against the likes of the PSOne and PlayStation 2. Unlike the GBA, which is truly a mobile gaming platform, if someone buys a console

these days it's become obvious they want

--- march 2004 NAG magazine

A lack of titles that appeal to the growing mature market is one aspect Nintendo might approach in the future.

more than just the ability to play games, or they want more ways to expand on their gaming experience. Both the PS2 and Xbox had DVD support and both now also have rather robust online cultures. The Game-Cube has neither and it's likely that Nintendo will approach at least one of these markets. The money stands on broadband gaming, though, since it will keep the console cheaper.

A newer design might also be in order. While the Xbox didn't appeal to the Japanese market due to its bulky design, the PlayStation 2 looks more like a piece of hi-fi equipment than a console and yet it still sold well. Some analysts feel that the GameCube's design doesn't appeal to the ever-growing 20-something and older markets, limiting its appeal as a more mature platform.

So is Nintendo down and out? Not really, but the lack of information regarding the N5 indicates that the company is more focused on trying to resolve its strategy for the future. Sony leads the pack comfortably, so they just need to ensure that they add to their next console without compromising the market they've worked to establish. Microsoft made some mistakes, but they built a good base in the US, plus the Live service secured them a good starting spot in the next console race. Nintendo's mistake was not making any but rather not doing enough of the right things. Instead of hardware specs (which are bound to be very powerful and impressive anyway) Nintendo is probably more focused on widening the next console's game catalogue. There's also the matter of the new mystery hardware hinted at last year and due to be seen at E3 in May. No-one knows what to expect (some speculate something akin to the Virtualboy, but it's not likely that Nintendo will take such a big chance at this stage). And while a lot of people in the industry feel that it's a do-ordie situation in 2005 for Nintendo's hardware plans, the company is still the most profitable of the three console giants, but the GBA can take a lot of the credit there, as well as the massive price cuts that the GameCube saw over 2003.

Take it to the Streets – Gaming goes mobile

his is the walkman of the 21st century," Sony President Ken Kutaragi said when he announced the PSP at E3 2003. And while it remains to be seen if Sony's handheld venture will make gaming as mobile as the



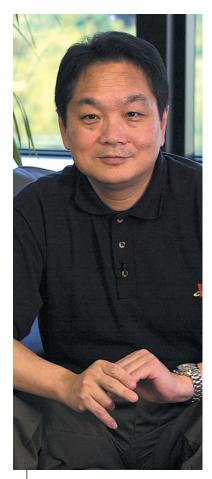
walkman did for music, it more illustrates that games are becoming more and more mobile. This has been thanks to the incredible success of the Gameboy Advance as well as the boom in cellphone and handheld technology. Whereas a few years ago few people had a cellular phone and the idea of a mobile computer was restricted to a clunky laptop, these days every second person chatters on GSM networks and most upwardly mobile business people own a PDA of some sort. And thanks to the expansion into wireless and Bluetooth technology, these devices have become more and more complex, making them even more indispensable to daily lives.

But with the exception of teenagers sending SMSs to each other, mobile devices have largely remained embedded in the world of industry. This has been changing, though; the most obvious example being the Nokia N-Gage. Granted, this might be a bad example were it not that other mobile devices are now also storming the beaches. The PSP is becoming the poster child of how serious mobile gaming has become. And all this attention into the sector is exactly what it needs to be taken seriously.

"The real opportunity is in expanding the market. It needs to get more sophisticated platforms and more sophisticated games," says Tasos Kaiafas, Intel's Game Software Marketing Specialist. Intel themselves have shown that they have a definite interest in the market with the XScale chip, a high-performance ARM-compliant processor that brings new power to mobile platforms and have



A Sony PSP concept design



"This is the walkman of the 21st century."
Sony President Ken Kutaragi on the PSP



already been used in several phone models from companies like Ericsson and Motorola. ATI also have an interest in the market with the Imageon chipset, aimed at delivering high-performance graphics on mobile plat-

The big question is which is the best way to go? By end 2004 gamers will be spoiled for choice as to what they would prefer to use. There is the PSP, aimed for a November launch, that boasts 1.8 GB media discs (3 times the size of PSOne CDs), the ability to play movies (up to 2 hours DVD quality) and deliver graphics that far surpasses the PSOne and sometimes even leaves the PlayStation 2 behind (in some rendering areas, at least). It's a gaming powerhouse, but Sony aren't planning much beyond that. "We feel strongly that what the consumer wants is a dedicated gaming device," according to Sony Executive VP Andrew House. That means Sony are looking in the same direction as Nintendo, but with more features.

On the other side of the scale are mobile gaming platforms like the N-Gage, Tapwave Zodiac and Gametrac. The N-Gage is still really just a phone with gaming capabilities, but future versions of the model could change that. While the N-Gage isn't doing that well, it would be premature to count Nokia out - they have the retail muscle and money to crack into the market and all that the phone needs is an improved future version. It's always easier to do something right the second time and Nokia has the clout to get that chance. Nokia's Senior Vice President, Ilkka Raiskinen, affirms that Nokia has the same mindset as other competitors on the future of mobile gaming: "We see boundaries between games and movies and entertainment in general

becoming more and more blurred. Crossmedia entertainment is a great opportunity." He adds:

rience will no longer be about games - it's a mobile entertainment experience." While that might be jumping the gun

games expe-



The Tapwave Zodiac is one of the new generation handhelds that wants to go beyond a gaming platform

a bit (one reason why the N-Gage has had a shaky start), the mobile has outdone any other phone platform as far as downloadable games are concerned. That might seem like nothing until one realises that mobile gaming was more popular than traditional online gaming in 2002 (by nearly 3 to 1). The Gametrac and Tapwave are also more focused on giving people more functionality in one device. While both are very capable of playing games (and boast software partnerships with the likes of Atari and Activision, as well as using chipsets such as the ATI Imageon), they expand with SMS and MMS support as well as using Bluetooth and GPRS technology for wireless multiplayer gaming. All the upcoming mobile devices support MP3 (and some AAC) playback, making them miniature players, plus the ability to play movies is touted more often than not as well. The Gametrac even boasts a built-in digital

The question: how will the public react?





"The game experience will no longer be about games - it's a mobile entertainment experience"

more features a platform has the more expensive it becomes (not to mention it can become a power-drain). Sony definitely has an advantage here in both being an established gaming name and having the market presence to make the PSP very popular (you can expect a large amount of games to be available, including a lot of PSOne ports), while devices like the Tapwave have a far more cost-effective development infrastructure, making games easy to create for it.

Then there is Nintendo. While everyone seems to be focusing on more features, the GBA and its predecessors have always been bastions of game-pure machines. This design philosophy hasn't worked too well for the GameCube when going against the Xbox and PS2, both sporting DVD and broadband support, the GBA is the most successful gaming platform in history and it might keep up that legacy, but a move up means that they'll have to lose the cartridge and potentially not be backwards compatible. But that's pure speculation and it's more relevant to see if the GBA Dual Screen will actually expand the GBA audience when it is released.

What can be expected is that the mobile gaming market will become a lot bigger with more serious players bringing out games that will even make the PSOne era seem long past.

Games - what lies beyond?

his time two years ago massively multiplayer games were all the hype and playing in online persistent worlds was seen as the next big thing. Two years on and little has changed in that genre, the major highlights being the launches of franchises such as Star Wars Galaxies and Everguest on the PS2. Since then these have moved into mainstream obscurity and the focus has been instead on the decline of British developers, the eversurging popularity of franchise games and the appearance of the N-Gage, which still remains to prove itself as a serious competitor in the gaming market.

So what will gaming in the next few years hold? By the looks of it the PC graphics hardware race has reached a bit of a stalemate, with major developers moving more towards physics engines and AI than actual graphic impression. While rendering technology is working towards more realistic worlds, the main focus in game development is to create titles that are cost-effective to make - both

in time and money. If there is to be a technology revolution in PC hardware, it will be geared towards physics models.



The future of game development looks to be saturated with even more franchises and license titles, which have begun to come into their own in 2003 and compete with traditional games.

amount of players in a game and other functions handled more by powerful CPUs than GPUs. The next gen consoles will also push processing power further than before thanks to IBM's PowerPC chips backing all of them - something that is likely to leave behind traditional development ideals, originally taken from PC games, for good.

As for the individual companies, the future of games over the next few years will be decided by three groups - the console manufacturers, movies and Electronic Arts. With the latter it's safe to say that EA has a major impact on the gaming market. In 2003 it had a 15% market share and indications are that it will probably be more this year. EA has gotten into the habit of mass-marketing cookie-cutter game concepts and relying on franchises, interjected with the occasional ground-breaker. It might not be the approach with the most soul, but it's very effective to the point that even companies such as Sega can't help but try to emulate some of that magic. Still, the majority of the remaining 85% of the market will still be publishers releasing more original content. But as EA keeps churning out the multi-million selling games, you can expect others to follow.



perhaps not▶



in the calibre of Manhunt or Grand Theft Auto, but something is afoot. Microsoft is probably the easiest to predict. Live has been a major shot in the arm for the Xbox and the company is bound to capitalize on this trend with more games focused on online components and features such as ranking systems and downloadable content. And if Microsoft and EA mend their ways, EA Sports titles can appear on the service, although it remains to be seen if the EA Sports Network will really be a major rival to Live and Sony's online services. Sony will also have a large online focus, taking Microsoft on with games on their network. It's quite likely that exclusive games will become major factors in which service you prefer to support. For instance, with Gran Turismo 5 you might be able to download new cars and modifications from the Sony Games Central service. You can also keep an eye on the Eyetoy and similar technology. If Sony manages to get some good third-party games for the unit, non-controller interactive games can become a big thing. The technology needs some refining, but it's getting there, plus it appeals to two markets everyone is trying to grab – females and older generations. Last, and probably least surprising, are movies and related spin-offs. Licenses make money - this is an undisputed fact, though a lot of people feel it is draining originality from the playing field. That said, in the past movie games have always created their own watershed by generally being poor and unappealing, but recently titles such as the Lord of the Rings trilogy and Black Hawk Down showed that movie licenses (or at least games inspired by movies) can both make money and deliver good gameplay; you can add the recent Indiana Jones game, T.R.O.N. and a range of other titles to that list. Games are a great way to increase the marketability of movies,

> Luckily it's not all heading that

way, though. All the studios are getting more serious in delivering good games, license or not. It remains to be seen if LucasArts' move away from Star Wars games paid off for them (since making tons of Star Wars titles didn't) but even studios like Fox Interactive (who recently appointed Jason Hall to help with product development) want to increase their credibility as bona fide game developers and not simply product mills.

It might seem premature, but the revolution is starting to cease and games as a solid entertainment business is the new model. With the popularity of consoles with mainstream audiences and online play quickly being taken away from the hardcore PC fraternity, games are going to become less technologycentric and more focused on simple gameplay mechanics, meaning the mould-breaking titles will still be there, but they are going to be rarer than ever. NAS





azy gamer's guide:

Logitech Cordless Desktop MX for Bluetooth

mainstream wireless market with

Bluetooth finally hits the

the Logitech Bluetooth keyboard

and mouse. First introduced at

Bluetooth is becoming more and

more relevant on their desktops,

Headphones. And the batteries such as PDAs, Cellphones and

are all included.

CES, it's another peripheral that

caters for people who find that

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Don't push this while upsets the process a The Standby button writing an article. It

this keyboard has a

Microsoft version,

Just like the Scroll away

built-in scroll wheel

to easily navigate

documents and

web pages. It lacks

the Back/Forward

buttons, though.

The keyboard is a standard Logitech multimedia keyboard, complete with shortcut keys to various functions, such as controlling multimedia playback such as videos and music. opening email, accessing the web and, most importantly, Type B Personality

Get docked

(the power point connects into the USB plug). Along with the phone. Obviously you can also contacts to and from your cell connect and sync PDAs using connects to your PC via USB phone manager, allowing you are unpopular, Logitech don't we). The dock also acts as a indicator for the keyboard. It seem to think so (neither do insist that recharging docks to download messages and While some manufacturers device, including a mobile Bluetooth hub and status software to manage the hub you get Bluetooth

Rodents!

the side for Back and Forward while didn't have a meter-long screen, but scroll buttons and two buttons on complimented with two additional nippy little bugger, moving at 4.7 we'll take the specs' word. It has three top buttons, a scroll wheel The smooth-looking mouse is a resolution, or 1m a second. We Megapixels a second at 800dpi web surfing. There's also an awkwardly-placed Switch Application button.

The real perk behind this

Bluetooth and the PDA's

software.

Bluetooth hub, allowing you to hook up to keyboard/mouse combo is the recharging bay for the mouse, which also acts as a Headphones, laptops and even your pet Mouse and Keyboard that means five seven devices to your PC. After the dog, as long as it has Bluetooth others, including PDAs, phones, capabilities...

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OTS, Dolby Pro Logic

Power Rating 45 Watts RMS Total Power Subwoofer •• 20 Watts Speakers •• 5 Watts Each

Driver Subwoofer 4" Woofer Center •• Dual 3" Full Range Speakers •• 3" Full Range

Impedance 40hms

Frequency Response 50Hz to 20,000Hz

Control/Function Power. Volume controls for Main, Center, Surround and Subwoofer, Mute, Input Selection, Audio Mode

Cabinet Material Wooden

Inputs / Outputs Inputs -SPDIF: Coaxial, Optical -RCA Left/Right (Stereo) Outputs: -RCA Front Left/Right, Rear Left/Right, Subwoofer

legacy

bioware

Trivia: In 2002, Bioware was the top exporter of Canada's Prairie Provinces.

Shattered Steel 1996



Before all the swords & sorcery, Bioware were investing their development time into a mech game that still stands as one of the best in the genre. Take on rival clans for resources on colony worlds using big guns. Cool.



MDK2 2000

If Shiny made a classic, Bioware raised it to a legend. Sporting a new engine and new play dynamic mechanics, the sequel to MDK was a blast



Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn 2000

Enhanced graphics, a lot of new stuff, a whole new part of the world and the continuation of the game story transformed BG II into another classic. Of course, being one of the most anticipated sequels of all time helped...



Neverwinter Nights 2002

Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Unrentide

2003



Boasting the 3rd Edition rules, CRPGs become 3D in an all-new game, separate from the original Baldur's Gate series. Reactions were mixed, though, as too many BG fans found the game lacking an epic scope.



Introducing prestige classes and a few extra items and tweaks, the expansion wasn't that monumental and only extended NWN's lifespan by a small margin.





Bioware stormed the gates with the game that revolutionized RPG games on the PC. Based in TSR's Forgotten Realms world, it was an instant classic.



1998



Instead of expanding on BG's story, Sword Coast instead gave games four large quests into the Forgotten Realms, helping them build up powerful characters by meeting new creatures and killing them.





Murder and Mayhem comes to the PlayStation 2. While it was a bit of a lacklustre conversion, it still captured the essence of the game - which was killing aliens; preferably with the world's smallest nuke.

Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal 2001



The story behind Baldur's Gate finally comes to a close as you discover your true destiny. As usual, more monsters, more items and more quests. But who's complaining?

Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark 2003



While both Neverwinter Nights and its first expansion lacked a lot, according to fans, Underdark aimed to rectify it with bigger worlds, more unique monsters and a return to that truly epic Bioware RPG.



Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic 2003

Reactions were mixed, but it seems most of us did enjoy KotOR, the Star Wars RPG developed for PC and Xbox. While not as vast as any of the NWN or BG games, it was still fun and left fans aching for an expansion.

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2 --- march 2004 NAG magazine

domain of the_basilisk:

Why Games Today Suck

I haven't played a new single-player game in months. In fact, aside from reviews, I don't think I played one at all last year. I just don't seem to get much pleasure out of them anymore. I can hardly remember the last time I was really excited about an upcoming release, but I can clearly remember a long string of disappointments. I'm being bored, over and over again, by an industry that's growing, in my mind, increasingly bland. Does this mean gaming is no longer "my thing"? Has my lifestyle changed? Has my intellectual focus shifted to more mainstream forms of entertainment like movies and sports? Am I becoming less of a gamer? Of course not. There have been many games in the past that enthralled me for weeks on end. I can return to them, even now, and draw the same level of enjoyment as I did the first time round, which is what I'm currently doing out of sheer desperation. You see, the problem isn't with me. It's with game developers worldwide and their products which for the most part are becoming, quite frankly, dead average.

This opinion, of course, excludes competitive titles which are far less dependant on the games themselves, and more on their communities. The players are the ones to determine how much fun they and their peers could possibly have. With single-player games, on the other hand, the human opponent is non-existent and so the entertainment we get out is fully reliant on what the developer puts in. So I'm going to come right out and say it. To hell with realism! To hell with the revolutionary physics engines of Doom 3 and Half-Life 2! To hell with the Radeon and the GeForce! The human race is not the slightest bit ready for these technological advancements if we cannot even produce a single game in an entire year with a decent storyline. I

honestly don't care how good a game looks if it's no fun to play or doesn't hold my interest. However pleasing the visuals, I can guarantee there are a hundred films that look better in every

respect, and



if it's eye candy I'm after, I'll go to the cinema. That is not, and never has been the point of a game. What we need is true interactivity. We need an engrossing plot, and a play dynamic that actually requires thoughtful input from the player. And is it so much to ask for just a snippet of originality?

I firmly believe that the reason the "classic" games were better, all nostalgia aside, is that the developers were restricted by hardware, instead of being empowered by it as they are today. There was a clear and definite limit to what could be done graphically, and instead of trying to push the envelope in that department, they were forced to make advances in a far more meaningful one, one that now seems to have fallen by the wayside – inventiveness. A game only needed to be stable, and then it was practically as good as it was ever going to get, technically speaking. Their only choice was to create something that was better than its competitors on a

creative and intellectual level.

Perhaps I'm being a little harsh on the industry, I think to myself. Naturally, it has become more difficult in modern times to create an enjoyable title than it was when computer games first emerged. Novelty has always played a pivotal role in what human beings find interesting, and when a concept was used for the first time, it was naturally better received than when the same concept is re-used today. But that then leads me to ask, why are we re-using old ideas? I think, despite all our fundamental flaws as a species, that we can handle something new, can't we? We won't curl up on the floor in fetal positions, vacant expressions across our faces, drooling on ourselves, at the exposure to an

original concept, will we? I can't speak for the rest of you, but I think it'd have quite the opposite effect. I think it'd put some colour in my cheeks. And it would certainly make the games a lot more colourful. There are those who will vehemently argue that there is no

originality left. While I am certain they are correct about that statement in their own lives, they are most certainly wrong in the context of the real world. The permutations one can draw from even the simplest of situations are virtually endless. There are just too many possibilities for us to have come anywhere near to exhausting them. We don't need to invent entirely new genres. Divisions such as genre are large, rather obvious, and were around long before this burgeoning little industry of ours. What we need to do is stop thinking about games in terms of genre (first person, adventure, platform, simulation, etc) and start thinking, as it is done in literature and film, in terms of story, character, setting and situation. That is where the originality comes in. And the most basic structure of a good setting / story is currently missing. If you were to hand in a script from even one of the best-selling titles today as a university writing assignment, you would most probably fail.

What makes Sonic the Hedgehog (to cite a simple and popular example) infinitely more enjoyable than Crash Bandicoot? Firstly, Sonic was the original, and Crash is a blatant rip off. The developers of Sonic went to great lengths to ensure that the idea for their character, and also their level design, had never been seen before. There had been thousands of platform games before Sonic and the genre was already well established, but no-one had ever seen anything like it. Crash, however, plays on already-existing notions of what a platform game should be, and as such is just that - an average platform game.

Even through all of this, I don't think the developers out there are stupid. In fact, I'm sure they're quite well aware of all the points I've made in this article. Why then, one might ask, are we faced with this particular problem? Surely knowing about it is half the solution? Are developers scared that something new won't be received well by the public? I doubt it. I think they're just lazy. When people start out in a creative industry such as this one, they are always young; full of energy and ideas. But soon enough they get older, and tired, and it becomes just a job. They end up only doing what they need to do, in order to put food on the table at the end of the day. And they know they can get away with it, because the gamers are doing the Mexican wave over the latest graphics engine and only realise that it hasn't actually enhanced the experience after they've bought the game. The disheartened developers re-establish that it doesn't matter how poor their game is, people will buy it anyway. And they start work on the next sequel.

"The permutations one can draw from even the simplest of situations are virtually endless.

There are just too many possibilities for us to have come anywhere near to exhausting them."

SONIC FIRST TIME EVER ON PlayStation. 2



SONIC DEBUTS ON PlayStation. 2

PlayStation_®2



SEGA

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pc preview:

The call came late in the afternoon - around the time most other office plebs start glancing at the clock on the wall on a Friday afternoon and wondering if they'll be noticed leaving this close to five. The Far Cry preview had just been delivered to the local distributor and did we want it? Cough, is a melon hairy? Before the phone went down someone was already reversing their car out the driveway. It was an agonising wait - at that time in the day all highways were going to be as fat and slow as a python in a puppy shop. Nevertheless, zooming past bewildered motorists, one foot just touching the brake our intrepid driver flicked on the hazards and abused the emergency lane all the way there and back - the game was in the NAG office exactly 1 hour and 15 minutes later.







far cry





You know, when you've been doing this job for as long as I have you only really need to play a game for about ten minutes to determine if it has promise or not. If you're sitting there in shock and horror,

has promise or not. If you're sitting there in shock and horror. questioning my integrity then I'm sorry to slap you with the cold fish of reality - this is just the way it is. Having said that however there is still that twang of guilt that'll keep me playing to the very bitter end, if only to just get a screenshot of the end boss that I can slap in the review to prove to the questioning and critical masses that, yes, I did actually play and finish this trashy title - just for you, just so I can sleep at night. The point: Far Cry also only needed a quick ten minutes of play for me to figure out that it is definitely going to be one of the hot peppers in first person gaming this year, I'd even go so far as to say watch out DOOM 3 and careful where you tread Half-Life 2 but those games are probably also going to be incredible and amazing. The big difference is that Far Cry is here now and it's solid enough to make you forget all about ventilating demons on Mars and banging aliens on the head with a

Engine

crowbar.

The Crytek engine is certainly a revolutionary experience and besides the lovely looking water, the game certainly does the business by putting on the best looking and moving FPS graphics to date, eclipsing Unreal II by far; naturally having a tropical island as a backdrop is always going to help your case to some degree. Now more than ever it's really going to pay to upgrade your computer - screw the bond and car payments, they won't kick you out of your house or repossess your car if you default on one little payment

Besides all the swishy particle effects and complex looking models the single most impressive aspect of the CryEngine [with a TM] is its ability to render massive outdoor levels, and, just as easily, indoor environments -

and all of this from a single loading screen. It's impressive when you consider that as games ramp up in complexity they should in theory increase in size and weight; Far Cry is an encouraging step in the right direction and oddly a step back into the past when optimising and reducing the size of your code was considered a good thing. In the first person shooter genre no game is complete these days without some real world physics, this kind of thing includes rag doll physics, character inverse kinematics, animation blending and a pile of other technical terms that really just mean the game attempts to mimic real life as accurately as possible to give the gamer a more 'real' and engrossing experience. From the ambient bird life and realistic cart-wheeling of dead bodies through the air after a well timed explosion, Far Cry looks and feels the part, a little like a Hollywood action film in fact. The game engine is on par with everything we've seen so far from id Software and Valve.



" you'll feel like a tough

mercenary, able to kill

with your bare hands

until you look down at

your gut resting on the

desk and remember, as

packet of 'light' crispy

snacks, that you're not. "

vou reach for that

The game's play dynamic is as real, for an action computer game, as it gets; you'll feel like a tough mercenary, able to kill with your bare hands until you look down at

your gut resting on the desk and remember, as you reach for that packet of 'light' crispy snacks, that you're not. In Far Cry for a long few seconds every few minutes you'll feel like you're really there, you'll take cover behind a tree because you don't want to get shot, because the last time you saw Saving Game or something like that flash on the screen was all the way back behind the enemy base - way back when they had no idea you existed.

Moving away from the technical aspects of the game, there are a few things that are going to make Far Cry something special. For starters the artificial enemy intelligence is good enough to force you to approach each reload differently - even if you die five times you'll





















Buggy Humvee Patrol Boat Inflatable Boat Hang Glider

never really experience the exact same set of circumstances again. Understandably some of the enemies do the same things under the same circumstances but there's a world of difference in taking the stealthy approach and the run and gun approach - not that you can really go in aggressive all the time. Considering this is preview code on the odd occasion enemy characters were not aware of me, even when I was standing right in-front of them and in one scenario I swam out to an island and started taking pot-shots at the bad guys, who responded by running along the beach and coming towards me - in single file... through the water. It was a massacre as I popped them at my leisure while they diligently swam towards me, human 1 computer 0! Although I mock the PC now I did spend a few minutes

here and there cowering in terror in a darkened patch of the jungle while a three man search party tried to track me down and I won't forget the time I ran away in terror when the lights went out

underground, and there was that one time those creatures came at me in what I could swear was a coordinated attempt to herd me into a kill zone. So yes, there will inevitably be AI problems but the overall effect is an uncanny realism that will have you smiling and shaking your head in amazement.

Multiplayer

Although the preview didn't feature any multiplayer component, from the single player game you don't need to be a genius to figure out that this game is going to hit the multiplayer scene in a big way. Players can even occupy 3 'live' positions on a Humvee - you can drive it, man the cannon and machine gun on top or if you like just sit in the passenger seat and take pot shots at the monkeys in the trees. Excellent stuff, and the boats are also fun to use and don't forget you can also man mounted multiple barrelled machine guns and mortars. As you'd expect there are a handful of multiplayer game modes planned for the final release version. The only thing that might harm the multiplayer element is the games high system requirements - but you can always turn off some of the heavier settings and play it that way. So, is Far Cry the next big thing? Damn right it is.

Let's get physical

As you can see from this series of screens, physics and the 'practical' application thereof is alive and well in Far Cry... there was a bad guy under there - but a bullet got to him first.





















Zoom in for a better shot - you can actually take that gunner out if your aim is steady

























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BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM



With the 'Battlefield' brand well and truly established after a number of successful titles, Swedish development team, Digital Illusions, continue on with a Vietnamese setting and a whole host of new ideas. We spoke to Armando 'AJ' Marini, Lead Designer on Battlefield Vietnam.



How do you feel the Battlefield brand has advanced and what were the main targets of achievement in terms of play dynamic and new ideas?

The primary goal we had was to make sure we were different from BF1942. We didn't want to just be looked upon as a modification, not to be seen as BF1942 in Vietnamese clothing. The team has worked hard to ensure the game is more balanced in terms of infantry versus vehicles and wanted to make the vegetation an integral part of the game play. I believe we've achieved all that we set out to achieve.

You have created a new graphics engine and improved AI for the game. So what primary improvements and differences will the player see compared with your previous title?

Interestingly enough, players recognize the improvement but it really doesn't impact on them until they compare the new game to the original. The vegetation looks so natural that players don't seem to recognize it was completely absent in BF1942. If you look at the games back to back, then you really see the difference. The A.I. is much more human-like and consequently soldiers don't do some of the really silly things they originally did! My favourite part is the way they now taunt you. It really brings them, and the game, to life.

Why did you choose the Vietnam War and has it created any problems?
The fact that there will be gamers playing who have actually been there must have meant you had to

actually been there must have meant you had to research the subject deeper and must ensure that everything fits into the time line?

Vietnam was the next logical step in the BF series. We wanted to include it because it was such a pivotal point in world politics. It was a war where the question of 'why' is more prominent. It is just a very engaging conflict. Having already seen the reactions of players, we were more aware of how important accuracy was in

the conflicts. However, for all the research we did, it was not feasible to faithfully recreate the battles. It's also not fun. The Battlefield series isn't about historical accuracy, it's about a fun multiplayer game with real world roots. Players will be able to see the benefits of our research and I think if they research the battles, they'll be pleased with the degree of accuracy we've achieved.

There is a whole new set of weapons and vehicles served up. Does this really make much difference in terms of play dynamic as opposed to WWII ones? Is it more than cosmetic?

It's easier to see and pinpoint the diversity in vehicles that are drastically different. I mean a tank is a tank and for all the subtle differences, it still has to fulfil the role of a tank. So I would say that vehicles like that are not going to appear revolutionary to anyone. The helicopters are the big difference. With the new physics we created for the helicopters, the offensive and



defensive capabilities of the forces are markedly different. You can pile a group of players into a helicopter and hover over each flag point and capture flags really quickly. Of course, this is a very risky manoeuvre. You can also attack and defend much more effectively in the helicopters by hovering or strafing sideways. They really do intensify the experience quite a lot. For the weapons, again there is nothing revolutionary in the actual weapons. Where we put the focus was on the feel of the weapons. We've really focused a lot of attention on making the weapons feel very accurate and satisfying. We wanted the player to feel like they were holding the weapon in their own

Can you detail the environment a little and some of the missions and tasks that the very organic setting of Vietnam made this a very different war to that of many others?

We wanted to recreate the feelings of the war. In the Second World War, battles in Europe rarely were fought in amongst the trees. They were usually in open farmland and such. Infantry fighting distances were measured in the hundreds of metres. In Vietnam, the average combat distance for infantry was 20 metres. Imagine that for a moment. You and all your friends are 20 metres away from the enemy and they all have highpowered weaponry. The environments vary, but the 'in country' battles, such as the Cambodian Incursion or the la Drang Valley, are the ones where you get a sense of the differences in the game. The Cambodian jungle

density means that vehicles need to stay on the main road. They are unable to get through the thick forests like the players can. We can search for your team members and you'll see that they are nearby, but visual contact is a little more difficult. You also get this paranoid feeling since you know that between you and your team mates are equal numbers of enemy soldiers.

Following on from the last question, would you detail one event in the game that really sums up the essence and excitement of Battlefield Vietnam?

Airlifting - it is so cool to be in the middle of battle and then have your team (or the enemy, if you are playing as NVA) drop a tank or something like that into the middle

The one thing that marked this war was the differences in the opposing forces and the nature of this war was different from many others. How do you feel you have coped with creating this setting and how do you manage to convey the sort of fox and rabbit/David and Goliath scenario?

We really couldn't make the two teams unbalanced in terms of game play. So there is no compensator that gives one-team 22 players and the other team 10 or something similar to that. We focused on the feel and character of the forces. The NVA and VC teams feel very different from their U.S. and ARVN counterparts. Also, the design of the maps really plays to those different feelings and impressions.



What would a Vietnam game be without those movie quotes? Here's a few we bet someone will mod in...

Good morning, Vietnam!

[Good Morning Vietnam]

I love the smell of napalm in the morning.

[Apocalypse Now]

We've been up on that hill ten times, and they still don't think we're serious.

[Hamburger Hill]

Take the pain! Take it!

[Platoon]

Anyone who runs is V.C. Anyone who stands still is well-disciplined V.C.

[Full Metal Jacket]

Gentlemen, prepare to defend yourselves!

[We Were Soldiers]















pc preview:

When the concept was devised for the game, Syberia was one big story that the team decided to separate in two different episodes. So Syberia II is the continuation of the story started in the first episode. If you played Syberia, you've experienced Kate Walker's journey across Europe, from West to East. The next chapter will see the trip continue up north with some of the same characters you've met before and a whole bunch of new characters you'll meet along the journey.

The old chestnut will always be dragged up when talking to someone who is heavily into adventure game writing and Benoît Sokal, Artistic Director and Author is no exception.

"A few years ago, adventure games were the most

popular among the industry and the players. With the quick evolution of the computer technology, the options increased so much that a wide variety of new genres appeared and put adventure games on the block a little bit. The market is big. We think that people who never played any Computer or Video Games would love playing Syberia. Those. plus the hardcore adventure gamers, plus average gamers represent a huge audience for Syberia and

the adventure genre in general. The adventure genre will be strong when the stories told in the games are strong and captivating."

In terms of play dynamic, the team has focused on integrating the puzzles into the storyline. It's a challenge they faced in the first game and wanted to make even better with Syberia II. Benoît spoke of the puzzles needed to make sense of the story for too many adventure games have puzzles just thrown in for good measure. In Syberia II you will see a strong storyline featuring interesting puzzles and dilemmas.

Another aspect worked on has been interaction between Kate (the player) and other characters. A more fluid approach to these interactions will enhance the game and the detailed graphics and finer zoom enhance the atmosphere and experience. On her adventures Kate will

once again explore four completely new environments -Romansbourg, The Great North Passage, The Youkol Village and Syberia; each location has its own characteristics and will play a major role in the development of the story.

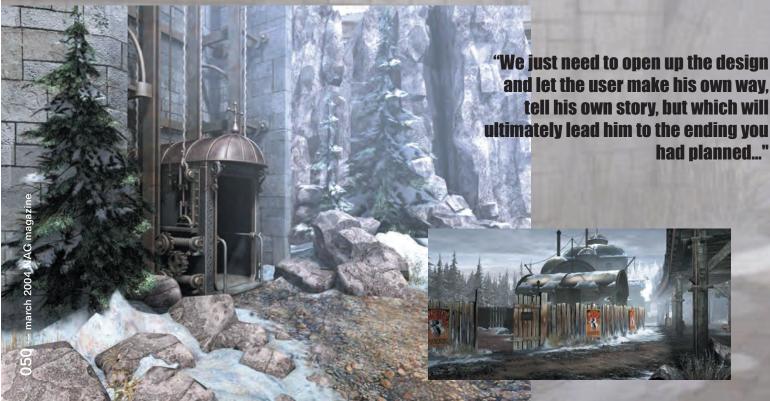
syberia II

Surprisingly a lot of research has been done on mammoths, Siberia, Russia, the 'recent' history of Western Europe, the automaton technology to ensure good plausibility of the story and the background work on the game has included an immense amount of primary work - mounds of drawings which include the environments, buildings, vehicles, but mostly characters. Now, the team has really understood the look and feel of the game so most of the artwork is now made for the creation of the characters.

"If we look at that [RPG] industry, well, the whole 'adventure game as an RPG' is not too far away. All we need to do is get away from the paradigm of solving problems simply by smashing things up. Let's say that we had what basically amounted to as an adventure game (solve problems, talk to people, etc.) and we did combine it with a decent combat system. Add to this a character that is getting better at doing things and learn new skills as the game progresses...this vision of a hybrid is not too far away.

"The only thing, in my opinion, that is missing is the ability to deal with any given problem in multiple ways, allowing the player to shape the story as he sees fit. Some 'action' games already do this to a certain degree. Grand Theft Auto III allows for multiple solutions as well as Hitman II. The only thing is - there games are more focused on combat and not enough on pure problem solving. We just need to open up the design and let the user make his own way, tell his own story, but which will ultimately lead him to the ending you had planned..."







pc preview:

wars and warriors: joan of arc



She may have been accused of being a witch and burned at the stake, but there's no doubt that Joan of Arc was one utterly badass French woman. Wars and Warriors: Joan of Arc is the latest offering from Enlight into the

cross-genre market, combining third person slash and slaying action with real-time control and command of legions of military units.

At its foundation, Joan of Arc is your standard thirdperson hack and slash. As you run around the rolling landscapes fighting enemies you'll generally gain experience, levelling up provides the chance to upgrade your standard RPG stats or improve your range of attacks. Combat remains straightforward, a light attack works well for quick dispatches while the heavy attack can be thrown in strategically to knock down enemies or break through defences. With proper timing, comboattacks are possible and each combo attack is upgradeable for even more carnage. Progressing through your objectives might even present a horse or two, useful in combat since enemies have a harder time hitting you if you're astride a massive beast of war. Even your attacks from horseback are upgradeable, a level of advancement sorely missed from your standard action games. Mission objectives seem strikingly varied, defending a town from English invaders right through to rounding up errant peasants who've gotten themselves lost in the forest. Thankfully Joan does not have to fight alone against the often insane amount of enemies; troops ally themselves to your cause letting you marshal them through the battle. The higher your leadership state, the better your troops will fare. Occasionally you might have access to traditional weapons of war such as catapults, battering rams and trebuchets to help you open up a proverbial can of French fury.

Joan of Arc manages to capture the feeling of being there, on the battlefield, amiably. Often feeling like a single unit in a massive Real Time Strategy battlefield, pummelling into enemy troops atop a horse never fails to impress. In the heat of battle you can switch from Joan herself to one of the other Generals accompanying you, letting you use their skills appropriately. If you happen across a blacksmith or market you can buy better weapons or armour and stock up on provisions. Certain special items can be found that will boost specific stats while the items are worn, a definite leaf from the RPG series. The preview build made a favourable impression; hopefully certain control issues will be resolved before the final is released. Graphically, Joan of Arc is neither terrible nor amazing though this too is subject to change before the final; however, its ability to render massive amounts of enemy/friendly units onscreen at once is jaw dropping. The voice acting was not yet implemented in this version but the subtitles managed to bring the story

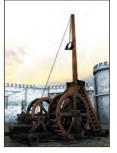
While not a revolution in gaming, Joan of Arc manages to bring the RTS, RPG and Action genres together in a symbiotic union suited to the war-theme era of Joan of Arc.







Siege Machines



Trebuchet

During a siege, the trebuchet was one of the more feared weapons of medieval times

Trebuchets rely on a huge counterweight to swing the long arm that holds the projectile weapon. When the counterweight was dropped, the device launched this projectile at great speed from a sling at the end of the arm.



Bolfo

Belfries can be built in order to scale castle walls. Soldiers stand ready inside the structure as others wheeled it against the castle wall.



Cannon

Cannons are large, smoothbored, muzzle-loading guns. The first cannons were large, banded, wrought iron weapons.



Arbalest

The arbalest [or ballista] is a powerful weapon in the guise of a giant crossbow - designed to eject heavy bolts.



Battering Ram

Siege armies can use a battering ram to break down the gatehouse door or even smash a castle wall.



Electronic Sports World Cup Qualifier

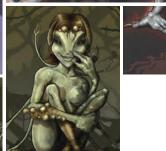


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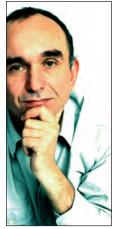




FABLE

Fable is a groundbreaking role-playing adventure game in which your every action determines your skills, appearance, and reputation. The premise is to create your life story from childhood to death. Grow from an inexperienced adolescent into the most powerful being in the world and choose the path of righteousness or dedicate your life to evil. Muscles expand with each feat of strength; force of will increases with each work of wit. Obesity follows gluttony, skin tans with exposure to sunlight and bleaches bone-white by moonlight. Earn scars in battle and lines of experience with age. Each person you aid, each flower you crush, each creature you slay, will change this world forever. Game development legend Peter Molyneux sat down with us and spoke about this epic RPG game in development for quite a while now, due out later this year on the Xbox.





Will Fable's innovative game design be apparent in other areas of the game; for example, will the combat offer something new or rely on old methods?

We have worked very hard on the combat system, with a team working on this for the last three years our ambition was to create combat which didn't rely on button bashing, adds a new angle through multiplayer and uses Al to intelligently challenge the player. With these aims in mind you can mix range combat, sword combat and magic combat so each player can create their unique style and we are also aiming for something as polished as anything you have seen in any other game with elements which have never been seen before



We've heard talk of allowing players 'heroes' to fight off in a multiplayer mode; is there any truth to these rumours?

In Fable there is multiplayer mode which allows up to 4 players to cooperatively take part in combat - three player characters appear on screen as alter egos which have limited ability but these alter egos have the right to play as the main character and so can swap into the main hero role.



How significant is having your own children; will these add extra longevity and replay to the game? For example, can you go off as your child after you've completed the main game, possibly on Xbox Live! content or as a result of the simulated environment?

Great idea! The children you have are significant and play a part in the story but you cannot play them when they are grown up or swap into their characters.

Q

Can you tell us about the magic system; how it's used, what can the player do, and are there any restrictions on what can happen?

The magic system compromises 21 different magic disciplines, each class has multiple levels, which can be powered up. It is alignment based so if you're evil the evil spells you cast will be more powerful and conversely if you're good your good spells will be more powerful. Certain spells can be combined so if you wanted to go over the top you could for example mix slow down time with assassin march with lightening bolt with battle charge, which would be quite some spell!



Will the hero's mother and sister still be alive after he's gone on a quest, got married, had children, sold the kitchen sink and finally decided that he'd better get around to what he was originally doing?

The quests in the game are there to be taken at the player's convenience so if you so wish you can settle down, buy a few shops and homes, rent them out and live the life of Riley, but eventually you will be 'encouraged' to return to questing and without spoiling any surprises your family seems to get themselves into terrible trouble.



How does the present interaction between you and the team work and has it changed much since the conception of the game?

At the moment I spend every waking second thinking about Fable; I sit in amongst the team, I tend to play and look at the game for a minimum of 10 hours every day and this has been the case since just before E3 last May, prior to that my involvement in Fable was probably a half to one day a week.



Have you purposely tried to develop your own RPG system that is different from what gamers would be accustomed to and what do you feel is the most inventive/interesting facet of character evolution as you progress through the game?

Yes, we have and hope we are making something that is new, fresh and different. The real revolution is that you can be the hero you are destined to be (depending on how you play the game) within a simulated world that you can experiment with.

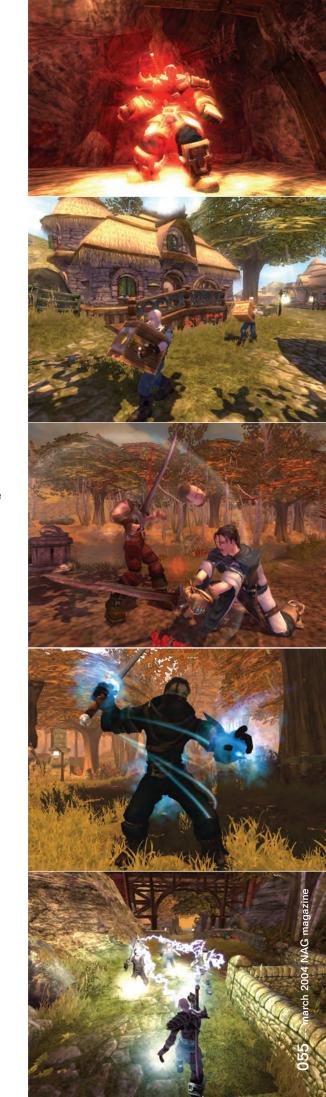


What has been the hardest aspect of the game to get right and do you sometimes feel that your efforts are not fully appreciated?

Probably the combat has been toughest to get right as there is a lot of subtlety needed. As for feeling unappreciated, quite the reverse as people have been incredibly supportive of me and Lionhead and I appreciate all the patience and understanding we have been shown.

Thank you Peter

You're welcome!



pc preview:

painkiller

In Painkiller you assume the role of Daniel
Garner, a seemingly regular guy who has just
been killed in a horrific car accident. Trapped
in a dark and unwelcoming world between heaven and
hell, you struggle to uncover the reasons why you've
been denied entry into heaven. Awaiting your
purification, you must fight through a seemingly endless
number of demon soldiers as you attempt to stop an
imminent unholy war.

"In recent years, FPS games have tended to 'slow down' in terms of play dynamic." says Brian Gladman, Product Manager at

DreamCatcher Games,
"They have become more
methodical, tactical and
stealth-driven. Classbased characters are
great, and they certainly

have a place, but we felt that it was time to return to some of the FPS styles of the past. Painkiller is all about action - fast-paced, non-stop carnage. There's no 'Use' key, and no 'Crouch' key. We want you to be always moving, always shooting, always tense and on the edge

of your seat, giggling like a schoolgirl. There are certainly some huge sequels coming out this year and those games will of course do very well. We don't really expect to do better than those games, but we think we have a fun game that is fresh and new and

we think people will really dig it."

As in all cutting edge titles, technology plays its full part. The proprietary 'PAIN' Engine really allows for a unique look. Visually, the game features all the latest lighting and shadowing techniques, and incorporates all the vertex and pixel shaders, particle effects and other 3D tricks used in some of the other big games coming out this year. The engine is also a really fast renderer, which means the art assets can all have lots of polygons with high-resolution textures and it will still play smoothly. "It's funny... amazing graphics are almost expected from gamers now, so it's not really something we can

"We're really working towards getting Painkiller accepted by the competitive gaming community and hopefully we'll start seeing it used in pro tournaments in 2004"

rely on. Sure, our graphics are amazing, but so are the graphics in every other game coming out! From a technology standpoint, I think what really makes Painkiller stand out is the use of the Havok physics engine. We're really striving to integrate physics into the

game, so it's not just boxes bouncing around and lights swaying when you bump into them. The stake-gun is a perfect example of physics-based play. Our technology also is allowing for some really great multiplayer fun. We're really working towards getting Painkiller accepted by the competitive gaming community and hopefully

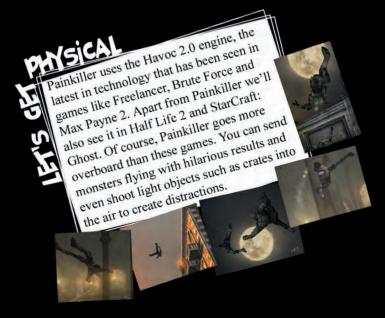
we'll start seeing it used in pro tournaments in 2004!" There are also a whole bunch of demon powers that you will be able to invoke at times throughout the game, using a Black Tarot system that will allow you to earn and play certain cards that will give you the ability to activate different demon powers: armour power-ups, weapon power-ups and so forth.

In the solo player game, you're progressing through a story, so it's pretty linear. The levels are all huge, and the way it works is that you'll have to clear sections of monsters before you can progress to the next section. Conversely, the diversity of the levels is actually one of the game's strongest points. There are 24 levels in the game, and they are all entirely different. There are no textures reused from one level to the next; for example if you're admiring the high-resolution stonewalls of the Castle level, you'll never see it used again in another level. Brian interjected, "We have levels that take place on a Monastery island, a Military Base, a Medieval Town, a Cemetery, a Factory and more. The level diversity should really help eliminate a lot of boredom for the players."

High on the priority list for action gamers are the weapons and there are 5 combo weapons in the game, and all sorts of goodies. The weapons are designed to be fun to use, and must actually incorporate some physics into their use, like the stake-gun. There will be more to it than a single-shot kill and move on approach. Monsters do have hit points, so you'll have to wear them down before they die. However, the stake gun is pretty much one-hit-one-kill, since it often impales your enemy to the wall.

Diversity in play dynamic, ideas, and challenge with a nice sense of progression is an essential ingredient in any FPS. You need a few quirky tricks and ideas to keep the punters amused and engrossed and by all counts the team has a plethora of surprises in store.









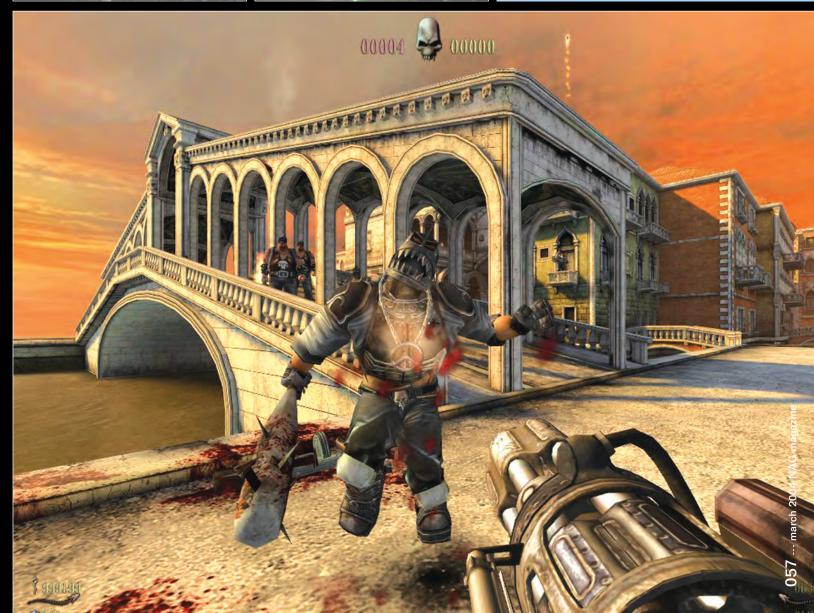






"The Al monsters in Painkiller are pretty single-minded - they just want to kill you. That said - there's still some interesting coding done there.

Monsters will attempt to flank you, or corner you, or overwhelm you with numbers. Different monsters have different Al coding as well - some of them will actually retreat if wounded, and some of the more powerful monsters will actually attack and use the weaker monsters to help them get to you."



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ps2 preview:

forbidden siren



When the rain becomes red and the river Mana flows red with blood, brace yourself for one of the scariest survival horrors to hit the PlayStation 2 this year...

Unlike the western world, our Japanese gaming counterparts have always preferred more cerebral and less action-orientated games. Survival horror is a great example of this culture shift, with the likes of Resident Evil and the spooky Silent Hill. But while both these games tend to make you cautious or get your skin crawling,

if you are used to survival horrors in general, you're not scared all the time. Forbidden Siren on the other hand freaked us out.

Released in Japan last year, it's finally getting the western treatment and thankfully it appears that most of the glorious chills the original title delivered are still here. In Siren you play up to fifteen characters going towards the town of Karuwari.

The cast is quite eclectic, including a 16-year old school boy, a high-school teacher, a nun and the religious leader of a local sect. But everyone is tied together by two things - the mysterious red rain that has started to fall down and turned people in the area into zombies, and the ability to sight-jack.

While the term is a bit dubious, sight-jacking is the ability to tune into the eyes of friends and foes around you. Tapping the L2 button turns your TV screen into static and you rotate the left analogue until you 'tune' into the view of something else, which you can then assign to a key.

This has two effects on you. Firstly, there's the ability to see where monsters and allies are and what they are doing. Nothing is quite as creepy as looking through a Zombie's eyes as it roams around. The second payoff is a quick flash of a monster's vision on your screen when it sees you, meaning you are definitely in deep trouble.

Siren concentrates on the new trend of SH games that are less combatintensive and more sneaky. In fact, some of the characters didn't appear to be combat-capable at all, so running and hiding is their forte. Some characters are armed with guns or melee weapons, but ammunition is scarce. The title is more focused on sneaking around and trying to outsmart the monsters. Because of the red rain, monsters cannot be killed permanently, but the upside to that is that you also get healed over time. Siren's play style is decidedly paced – something we quite enjoyed. Not only does it build tension (in the opening scene you need to start a car, so the developers make you do every step – from unlocking the door to starting the car and putting it into gear), but with the help of vision-jacking you have to figure out how the terrain looks.

You are supplied with a map, but usually you need to co-ordinate through the various viewpoints to know where you are and how to move about. In-between each level is a cut-scene that feels spooky and realistic (mostly because the texture and motion were taken from real actors). It also appears that how you play unlocks items that explain the story or introduce new characters, but the game could be a very linear affair.

Forbidden Siren will be a creepy game when it is released, easily catapulting it amongst other horror classics. In fact, even the sometimes awkward voice acting of the English version doesn't manage to steal any real shine here.













A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away... umm, no, wait. A longer time ago, in a galaxy the same distance away as the other one... Nope. A longer time ago in the same far, far away galaxy... oh, whatever. It's Star Wars.

The Star Wars mythology just gets bigger and bigger as time passes. Movies, books and PC games add to George Lucas' legend of light sabre wielding knights and unlikely heroes almost constantly. However, a large number of these, especially of late in the computer game field, fail to meet up to the original classics that surfaced oh so long ago. The trend in Star Wars games has been towards the mediocre, and many people have become disillusioned with the whole affair. The time has come, though, to sit up and take notice - there is a new kid on the Star Wars block, and this one means

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic is a game that redefines a genre, breathes new life into a flagging setting and sets a new standard in PC adventure gaming. That's quite an achievement and, as a statement, sounds like a lot of press hype. But this is no PR exercise. KotOR is the kind of title that has been needed for some time by both the Star Wars setting and by the CRPG genre.

Set roughly three thousand years before the films, KotOR details the tale of a group of intrepid adventurers that take on an evil Sith Lord and his minions in a bid to save the galaxy from their total domination. It has all the elements that make the Star Wars setting what it is; exotic locations, brave warriors, amusing droids, light sabres and, of course, the Force. The development for this project was taken on by BioWare, the

star wars: knights of the old republic

geniuses that have brought us some of the best computer based role playing titles in the past. And that's exactly what KotOR is - a CRPG. But instead of the conventional isometric approach that one might expect from BioWare titles, this game uses a third person view. This new perspective allows the game to show off its beautiful graphics and vast settings perfectly, and creates a more "personalised" experience for the player. Using a WADS style movement system (sans strafing, unfortunately) and real-time combat (that can be paused), KotOR sucks the player in and refuses to let them go until such time as it is good and done with him.

The player controls up to three characters at a time - his own character, and two chosen from a crew that is gathered as the game

mini games

During the course of the game, the player will encounter three types of mini games.

Pazaak - this s a gambling game played with cards. The object is to get as close to twenty as possible (almost like blackjack). It sounds a lot easier than it

Swoop Racing - a popular sport on almost every world, this is a kind of high speed, dodge-the-debris drag racing.

Space Battles - every now and then while travelling aboard your ship, the Ebon Hawk, bad guys show up. That's when you get to blast them using a turret mounted aun...





KotOR-

and Sand People.

(and anal) Selkath

have founded their academy

with the system will recognise the workings of it within the game as early as character creation. The Force is treated in a similar way to D&D spells. Dark and Light side powers are available, and vary in power and costs according to the alignment of your character. This dark / light balance is determined wholly by your actions as a player during the game.

An important aspect that was perfectly captured within KotOR is the overall "feel" of the title. This game looks like Star Wars, sounds like Star Wars and plays out like

Star Wars (complete with earth shattering twists.) And while the graphics are exceptional, special mention must be made of the very high standard of voice acting within the game. Characters are more believable because of it, and each one has a back story and distinct personality that enhances the depth of the game world immeasurably. The sad truth is that there are a number of little bugs that crop up within KotOR. Even after patching, one or two still came up. Sometimes the AI seems to have a mind of its own, too (in combat, anyway) but judicious use of the pause function takes care of that.

Despite the problems, KotOR is as close to the perfect computer game as I have seen in a very long time. It does everything right (to a point) and contains every element that one would want from a Star Wars PC game. So much could still be said about it, suffice that it amounts to a must have title for virtually everyone!

second opinion

Once in a while a title arrives on a game reviewer's desk that showcases what gaming is all about. One such game is Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic. This is one of the few games that deserves all the praise it has been getting. Even jaded US critics have rated this one highly. If you are not a Star Wars fan, you don't have to worry as the overall quality and play dynamics will see you glued to the screen for hours on end. Now I only need to decide whether I should turn to the Dark Side.

Rating: 85%

Iwan "Da3dalus" Pienaar



Minimum Specification

Pentium 4 1 GHz | 256 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator 4 GB HDD

8 Bugs

Beautiful graphics

Awesome sound

Solid story

Summary

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic is something of a revolutionary CRPG title. It is full of intense action and features excellent voice acting, stunning graphics and a great story, set 3000 years before the Galactic Empire. This is a must-play title that, despite a few bugs, will be appreciated by almost anyone - but especially by Star Wars fans.



planets to see,

You may come across a few familiar names on the

Tattooine - a vast desert planet, home of the Jawas

Manaan - a water world inhabited by the secretive

Kashyyk - the forest world home of the Wookies

Korriban - a volcanic waste land where the Sith

There is another planet, but that would be giving away too many secrets. Find that one for yourself!

list of planets visited during your adventure in

Taris - a city world under the yoke of the Sith

Dantooine - rolling grass lands house the Jedi

aliens to kill











Hats off to Revolution for remaining a mainstay of adventure gaming in an industry that seems to be more action and RPG orientated. These days the genre of Adventure is used quite liberally, even being included with the likes of Tomb Raider and Indiana Jones. But real adventure, the kind that was perfected in the mid-90s has become extremely rare, with usually just a few lacklustre titles cropping up here and there.

You'd note I'm avoiding the phrase point-and-click. I might have used that frame of mind before Broken Sword 3, but since I've been swayed - and that's no mean feat. Grim Fandango is the only adventure game to ever use 3D and pull it off to a good level of success. Even the fourth monkey island fell flat, lacking the spirit of the former games, making us think that what was missing is Point-n-Click. Naturally it chilled my spine to hear that the third Broken Sword game would be 3D and I was not looking forward to it. One of two things would be inevitable - either the control system would be very

cluttered and more effort to use than the game was worth or the game itself would have settled into the comfortable mould of spans of action routines with no real semblance of adventuring (not unlike the new Indiana Jones games when compared to, say, Fate of Atlantis).

I'm not going to bother telling you the story behind Broken Sword 3, not try and recap on the series itself. A far more pertinent mission is at hand here - one of convincing fellow adventure gamers that this is the new generation of the genre. Yes, I'm that impressed with Broken Sword 3. After only a few minutes the keyboard-only interface had my complete respect and the game was on. Of course, if Revolution didn't have experience in making adventure titles, things might have worked differently. But the engine works smoothly alongside an intriguing story, a simple inventory system and a pretty seamless play dynamic. There are action bits, but these simply require the quick hit of the right action at a given time, and these moments never deteriorate into arcade sequences. Instead, it gives the game pace and gets your heart racing at times, all while keeping things well within

Location wise the game is rich as well, though I felt too much time

the genre's borders.

broken sword 3: the sleeping dragon

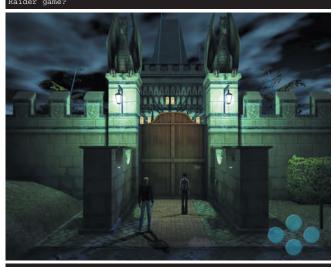
is spent in places like Paris and Praque. But that's

I could hold these things against the game, as well as numerous other little titbits, but what's the point? This is a good adventure game and adds a new breath of life into the genre - one that I hope will encourage a lot of other new adventure games.

Apparently this is the last Broken Sword title and while

because I like adventures in Jungles. Throw something like Amazon at me and I'm happy. The game options, though, lack quite a bit of polish. This is not something that will deter people, but it does tarnish my opinion of the developer a little. The game really needs antialiasing, something you can compensate for if you use your graphic card's property panel in Windows, but lower-end cards obviously won't give this privilege. The actors are also a bit like mannequins at times, not always correlating with the voice acting (which isn't bad at all, unless you have a serious allergy towards French accents, because there is a lot of that). The facial expressions are good, though, as are the scripted ingame sequences.





I'll miss George and Nicole (especially Nicole), I'm eager to see what's next. If adventure games are remotely your thing, get this game now.









Minimum Specification

Pentium 750 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 64 MB D3D Video Accelerator

- Great adventure game
- Nice story
- Good interface

Adventure gaming is being given a new breath here. While the game needs some polish here and there, it's re-established my faith in the genre going 3D and living on for a long time. If vou like adventure games, get it.

8 Needs some polish



The year is 1429 — The armies of the English kings are laying claim to the throne of France. The Hundred Years' War has begun. Can you develop your troops into an effective and powerful fighting force, one that will vanquish your enemy and pave the way to victory? In Joan of Arc the destiny of Europe lays in your hands.



BECOME THE WARRIOR

Execute awesome combos to devastate your enemy in the thick of intense combat action.



Live out the most exciting years in the life of the ultimate warrior, in her greatest battles.

BECOME JOAN OF ARC



BECOME THE GENERAL

Command troops in castle sieges with a unique mix of action and real-time strategy gameplay!



BECOME THE LEGEN

Become the greatest European leader of military powers throughout the 100 years was



www.enlight.com www.joa-game.com

GD-ROM Software



nc review:

person who can provide it.



The Government thinks you are a threat. Everything you know about the Alpha Sections, a militant force protecting your home Hillys from the invading Domz Armada, is wrong. The population needs the truth and there is only one

Without any pause, Beyond Good and Evil leaps straight into its impressive nature. Every initial facet, geared towards ultimate presentation. Right from the start, this

beyond good and evil

title blows you away with its audio and visuals. It's as if the planets all aligned to give us a game that manages to just do everything right. But let me digress... As Jade, an Action Reporter extraordinaire with a nose for the truth, you're thrust into the deep-end of an unbalanced intergalactic war. On the one side the horrific Domz Armada who seek to enslave most of mankind, on the other side the peaceful Hyllians who's only defence lies in the hands of the Alpha Sections. With the help of your camera, capable of taking digital

pictures and sending them to the right people, Jade must find out the truth of the Alpha Sections after being tipped off by the Iris Rebels, a clandestine group of individuals who believe that there is more to their saviours than meets the eye. It would be a difficult and lonely battle, if not for your companions. Pey'J, Jade's uncle, is more than just a simple plot device and humorous sidekick. Aside from being an aid in combat, he also contributes to the puzzles, allowing you to do two things at once (not through direct control, but rather pressing a button that's context sensitive. Stand close enough to a lever and Pey'J will automatically go stand at the correct. corresponding lever. This thankfully makes the 'teamwork' painless) and often allowing you to perform different types of attacks. Using his Jet Boots, Pey'J can leap up into the air and slam down on to the ground, causing enemies to fly up into the air where

you can hit them in slow motion (allowing you to aim) into various objects or other enemies. Combat remains smooth as silk, simply holding a direction and pressing attack will cause Jade to make the relevant changes in her position so as to best unleash fury on her opponent, much in the same style as Prince of Persia: Sands of

Combat does not happen as much as one would think; often the action takes a backseat to tense stealth missions where failure means fighting more than you





have to take pictures of the local wildlife so that they

can be categorized; each photo nets you money you can

use to buy items such as an animal scanner or a Pearl

finder. Pearls play an important role in the game as they







are directly linked to the plot progression. Using pearls you upgrade your hovercraft, allowing you to get into areas previously unreachable. With over 88 to collect (though not all vital for finishing the game), there is enough to keep enthusiasts busy. Some pearls are found by defeating bosses; others can be bought or won in entertaining mini-games.

The world of Hyllis is vibrant and engrossing. In the city, cars and boats fill the water channels with traffic while people wander around the streets doing their own thing. As the game progresses, you'll find the inhabitants of Hillys will change to reflect what you've discovered, adding a nice touch of reality to what you do. Artistically the style of the game may seem to be aimed at younger audiences, but that would be a misconception. Beyond Good and Evil manages to maintain light-hearted adult humour but also delivers a punch with its serious scenes. Every cut scene serves a specific purpose, idle banter between Jade and her uncle establishes camaraderie while the serious cut scenes set the tone for the mission.

As with most of the big-name titles of late, Beyond Good and Evil feels too short. This is by no means a negative complaint but rather, a wish that things didn't have to be over so soon. However, if you decide to go after every Pearl available in the game you'll find yourself busy for quite some time. Trying to take a picture of every species of animal on Hyllis, also not vital but it does

help, adds incredible length to the game and gives
you a sense of importance. Saving and loading
deserves a note due to its incredibly quick
nature. Saving is instant, loading only
takes a few seconds, making the
whole package feel polished

characters



Jade Age: 20

Occupation: Action Reporter/Photographer. Owner of Jade Reporting, she earns her living by doing commission work on her photographic reporting. Background: Orphaned as a young child in the poor area of Hillys not knowing her parents, Jade quickly learned defensive capabilities and street-smarts.

Pey J: Age: 50

Occupation: Handyman

Background: Half-man, half-Hog, Pey'J has been a great inspiration to his adoptive niece Jade, helping her on missions whenever he can.

and optimized.

The graphics are amazing, vibrant and stylish. The music will have you humming some of your favourite tunes from the game while in the bath [you bath? Ed]. The characters jump to life in front of you yet have the depth of a well-written novel. The game is, for all intensive purposes, one memorable moment after another. Nothing is perfect, however, yet the flaws in Beyond Good and Evil are thankfully few and far between. If you're running an older processor you will have to download a patch to make the game playable. Sometimes there are some save-game issues where you might find yourself unable to load your game, so be sure to save in multiple slots. Despite these problems, Beyond Good and Evil has a high level of quality and polish and while the storyline may not be complex or win any awards, the journey itself is worth every second.



an games reviewed on recti

Minimum Specification

Pentium 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator 2.2 GIG MB HDD

⊗ Too short

- Polished presentation
- Much to do
- Great characters

Summarv

It's hard to believe that in today's age of mediocre games, one can find a title that manages to impress at almost every milestone of the game's plot. Beyond Good and Evil is a tribute to excellent game design, a hats-off to stylish and vibrant graphics while managing to be a fun, engrossing game that presents you with hundreds of memorable moments.

81



▲ If it's ugly, kill it... basic principle



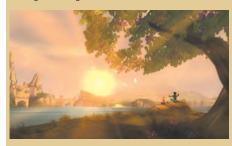


▲ Fish bigger than boats... that's reassuring

best bits

30 Seconds

A stunning intro provides a quick initial look at the level of graphical excellence that is predominant throughout the game.



2 Minutes

After the beautiful intro, you experience an aweinspiring fight scene with the Domz, setting the scene of the adventure.



10 Minute

Recovering from an intense battle with a massive airborne Domz, you head further into the city, taking pictures of the wildlife and exploring.



40 Minutes

Hanging out in a bar in Hillys, you challenge a shark to a mini-game, do some detective work and meet even more interesting characters.



Hour

Things go very, very wrong.



DC review:



Life isn't peachy. In fact, it's been quite miserable ever since your wife Mary died of cancer three years ago. And things are just getting gloomier every day - until a letter arrives from Mary, inviting you to Silent Hill, to meet her at your special place.

While this is the point where any NAG reviewer would write Return To Sender on the letter and go pick someone up at a bar, our protagonist heads to the town to find his wife (have I mentioned she's been dead for three years?).

Silent Hill 2 is the first time the series is on the PC and it's a direct port of the Xbox version, thus including the extra episode of Mary herself. It means proper surround

sound and high-resolution graphics. And these just go that step further to taking PC gamers into one of the best survival horror games ever made.

Hey, I might be bias, since I've never been a fan of artillery-heavy games such as Resident Evil, where combat is half of the experience. In SH2 exploration is far more important and adds to the experience in a much more profound way, since you don't really know when you are going to be attacked. While menial monsters are common, you can outrun them - but the bigger and creepier things only appear every now and then, making it very apparent that they are watching you and waiting for the best opportunity to attack you. Mixed in with this is a very spooky town that obviously has a deeply disturbing past, no sense of safety and a

lot of damned fog. As you dig deeper in your personal history, you discover other things that often you'll wish you didn't and you'll meet characters that aren't always all they appear to be. Or they might. Heavily saturated in Lovecraftian horror principles, SH2 crawls into those places that really scare you - the dark corner in a room or the far end of the alley you can't quite make out. The game is truly scary, to the point that many people I know never finished it thanks to the sheer intensity. Strange camera angles and the inherent graphic power of the PC bring things to life, not to mention the extremely eerie sound. The control system isn't excellent, as I would have preferred a

silent hill 2

mouse-driven interface, but that's the casualty of being a console port.

Silent Hill 2 is a very scary game and not recommended for the faint-hearted. If the likes of Resident Evil and Undying got to you in an extreme fashion, don't even bother with SH2 - it might kill you. A solid port of a classic title, play it in a well-lit room with a lot of people around you. That way your heart will stay strong enough to play the Silent Hill 3 port when that is released.



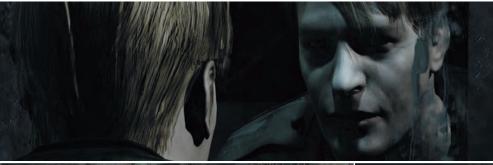
Minimum Specification

Pentium 700 MHz | 64 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator

- Very scary
- Good graphics
- Great sound
- R Ported controls
- 8 Too much for most people

Summarv

A direct port from the Xbox version, there's more than enough to play here, if your heart can take it. It's a great survival horror - hopefully encouraging more to appear on the PC









erything in this game to terrify you - even the paintings

Put Your Graphic Card Aside-The Enthusiast Paradise













ps2 review:





In a world where people look for excuses for all of society's problems, releasing a very violent computer gaming title is a very risky prospect indeed. But Rockstar games don't seem too concerned - in fact, the gaming titles that they have released over the last few years have all been at least on the questionable side of the "law", focussing on crime and violence. Now they have topped their previous attempts with one of the most controversial games ever to see the light of day.

The world is full of sick and twisted people. A group of these is the indirect focus of Rockstar's newest title, Manhunt. In this rather questionable game, the player controls a reprehensible character named Cash. Reprehensible because Cash is a serial killer, sentenced to death by lethal injection. However, a strange benefactor, known as Starkweather, sees to it that the

sentence is never carried out. In fact, Cash is released shortly after his sentence is supposedly carried out. The price for freedom? A few favours for Starkweather... Cash is sent out amongst gangsters who would see him dead. His "job" is to stay alive by any means necessary, which involves eliminating the aforementioned gang members. And while he fights for his life, Starkweather remotely films the action, creating snuff films for his wealthy benefactors.

This, I am sure you will agree, is a rather heavy subject matter. In fact, in the past, movies dealing with snuff films (like 8mm, starring Nicholas Cage) have met with very mixed receptions. However, there is an element to the game that takes the whole controversy of the title just a little further. Keep in mind that our anti-hero Cash is a killer, and very good at it. Victims are not just killed in Manhunt, they are thoroughly brutalised. Kill sequences are focussed on and are very "in your face,"

complete with shaky video camera style footage, accentuated by splashes of blood spraying the camera lens.

Manhunt is possibly the most brutal

manhunt

game I have ever seen. Yes, there are other violent games, and they are possibly just as vicious as this one, but the heavy focus on the violence of this title is what makes it stand out from others similar to it. Additionally, the violent killing of enemies is far more premeditated - the best results in the game are achieved by slaughtering unsuspecting victims, rather than going toe to toe with your foes.

The game allows the character to carry four weapons at a time. Categories of weapons are blunt, sharp, "one use" and projectile, each of which have their different uses. Ok, so the categories aren't really as clearly defined as all that, but you get the rough idea. You cannot, for example, carry two temporary "one shot" weapons. It's one or the other. But you can carry a baseball bat and a crow bar at the same time, because their categories don't clash.

As you progress through the game, different weapons become available. Not all weapons are useable as "assassination" weapons, but most are - these are the weapons that can be used to stalk up to unsuspecting victims and mercilessly slaughter them for Starkweather's twisted entertainment.

Each weapon has three different "degrees" of brutality. To use a weapon, the player needs to sneak up behind the victim and hold down the attack button. The longer









A brutal killing makes for good viewing

the button is held, the more brutal the violence of the killing is.

A few examples: a plastic bag can be used to suffocate the victim. However, the first degree is just plain old suffocation, while the third includes a rather nasty beating while the poor guy tries to draw his last breath. A piece of wire at the first level is used to garrotte the victim, while at the third level it decapitates him. And by the way, the decapitated head can then be picked up and used as a projectile to distract enemies. Pretty sick. This game is less all out action and more strategic. Sticking to the shadows and hiding bodies is essential, as is taking victims unawares. Going toe to toe with more than one enemy guarantees that Cash will get beaten to death (which he probably deserves, but kind of defies the point of the game.) It's more of a hyper violent version of Metal Gear Solid than anything else. Manhunt is a very slick package. It features good graphics and simple controls. But the most important part of this title's execution (sorry, bad pun) comes in the beautifully captured atmosphere that the game creates. Grainy graphics (like poor quality video) as well as haunting sound and "decorations" that fit the stark nature of the title.

It is not a question of whether Manhunt is a good game or not - it is a very good game indeed, of the usual quality that we expect from Rockstar. It is a well presented package, an original idea and an overall quality title. The real question is how people are going to react to it. See, there are elements of society that have the whole wrong idea about how weak minded gamers and kids really are, and this lot will certainly blame Manhunt for some or other social cancer out there. Never mind the fact that the game is rated "adults only" (since when is it a parent's responsibility to check things like this?). So, a word of advice - if you plan to play this game, make sure that you are either an adult, or have parents or guardians that aren't going to go ballistic when they see you controlling a virtual serial killer beating a guy to death with an aluminium baseball bat. And, please, if you in any way suspect that playing a violent video game might turn you into a slavering predator preying on pensioners at your local upermarket, please don't play this g<mark>ame</mark>.











Requirements

Analog compatible | Vibration compatible

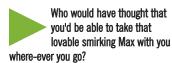
- Good graphics
- Addictive
- Dare I call it fun?
- 8 Over the top violence
- Disturbing
- Definitely adults only

Summary

Manhunt is a typical Rockstar title in that it finds itself on the questionable side of morality. Play as a serial killer charged with slaughtering gang members for the delight of rich patrons wanting snuff films. That, I believe, is enough said.

85

gba review:

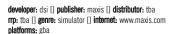


Despite the limitations of the GBA, Max Payne is an amiable port that manages to achieve everything it sets out to do, including bullet-time and dodging around corners. The music might be a bit

EAGLE

repetitive but it's easily overlooked just to gun down a few more bad guys. While not an original title, the story of Max Payne is re-told faithfully by using comic book style cut scenes and cliché film-noir dialogue. The introduction movie even has a full voice-over, setting the scene favourably. Much like the initial incarnation, Max Payne is a short but bittersweet ride, well worth the slight

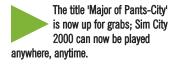
frustration in some of the levels and the promise of two extra game-modes once you've finished the



reviewer: Ed "Miktar" Dracon

gba review:

sim city 2000



It's all there, from taking your small town up to metropolis glory to surviving various scenario maps where aliens try to eat your power-plant. Despite the slightly sluggish control, this is a true example of GBA power. Every tiny aspect

of Sim City 2000 has been meticulously recreated.

Zoning your residential areas provides the people to fuel your bustling industry or commercial areas and creating the perfect balance is part of the game's challenging play dynamic.

Planning your roads and municipal services properly ensures that you don't have a riot on your hands every morning when people have to get to work. If

you've ever wanted to prove you can do a better job than those bumbling fools at cityplanning, this is your big chance.



developer: ea [] publisher: ea [] distributor: tba mp: tba [] genre: driving [] internet: www.ea.com

gba review:

max payne | nfs: underground



Yet another license trying to get on to every conceivable gaming platform, but surprisingly not failing as miserably as one would have thought.

A few catchy music tracks jammed in alongside the fully 3D cars are a decent deal, though the tracks are a bit uninspired and could have done with a

CAR

few graphical touches. More variety in the music would have been appreciated, but the lack thereof is by no means a train smash.

Up to 2 players can race against each other on a variety of tracks. By competing in the Underground mode, you can earn more money with which to upgrade your ride by adding decals and changing around engines and wheels etc.

> NFSU is a faithful, if watered-down recreation of the 'bigger console' versions, yet possibly the best racer on the GBA.



developer: sonic team [] publisher: sega [] distributor: tba mp: tba [] genre: adventure fighter [] internet: www.sega.com reviewer: Ed "Miktar" Dracon

gba review:

sonic battle



A fighting hedgehog roams the country with his bi-tailed fox friend trying to unravel the mystery of a monosyllabic robot that seems to be able to assimilate various fighting moves and styles.

An interesting and graphically impressive title with battles involving up to 4 characters, Sonic Battle provides a lot of fun, as well as a dash of collecting as

you try and get all the possible moves for your robot.

By linking up to 4 other GBA units, you can play either a variety of mini-games with your friends (or enemies), trade your robot's 'skill cards' with each other or even battle it out on varied of environments using your favourite Sonic character. The battle system is welldesigned and quite intense and the panning and rotating 3D environment is

> simply jaw dropping considering the platform. Certainly a definite must-have for any serious Sonic fan.







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Esquire, sole distributors, now bring you some exciting nev products that turn your computer into a powerful part of your home entertainment of your home entertainment system, so you can enjoy MP3s, Internet radio, streaming audio, and DVDs, through your stereo speakers in the highest possible fidelity.



HiFi-Link

Computer to Home Stereo

- Connect your computer to your home stereo with audiophile performance
- Advanced USB digital processing for ultra clean, high quality digital sound
- External interface cuts out distortion from inside your computer
- Includes free 30' studio grade cable

Awarded the Editor's Choice Award Futurelooks.Com

"A+: Gloriously clean and

distortion free sound output" "Many products join PCs and stereos but none sound as good for the same price." -Eliot Van Buskirk, CNet



Premium Computer to Home Stereo

- · Digitally connect your computer to your stereo with audiophile performance
- Professional grade USB digital engine for the ultimate in high fidelity processing
- · Send Doby® digital & DST® Surround Sound to your receiver
- Includes 30' coaxial cable, 30' optical cable, and 30' RCA cable

"An Overall Rating of Excellent"



February 25, 2003 The sound quality we experienced is priceless." - PC Magazine





Home Stereo to Computer

- · Record LPs, tapes & other music back into your computer
- Incorporates the latest USB recording technology for superior clarity
- Includes full ground loop isolation & gold plated connectors
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DC review:

railroad tycoon 3

When Railroad Tycoon was first released in 1990, it became a hit amongst railroad enthusiasts. This was the only computer game (at the time) that allowed the player to build and manage a railroad in Europe or America. Transport Tycoon followed in 1994 and expanded the genre to include all other transportation modes. While it was a solid game, it never achieved the cult status of Railroad Tycoon. Railroad Tycoon 2 and its expansion, The

Second Century, were released in 1998 and 1999 respectively. While good in their own rights, they never really captured the spirit of the original. Railroad Tycoon 3 has finally been released after what seems like an eternity.

The first thing that will grab the attention is that the franchise has

gone 3D. While it may be daunting for some to get used to the rotating and zooming camera, this element succeeds in making the player feel more part of his/her railroad. What makes the 3D-element especially useful is when you are laying tracks. The player will now be able to see the grade of a hill instead of having to rely on other methods of determining the inclination. While the graphics and sound are great, the most significant change in the game has been on the economical front.

> Managing the business end of your railroad has now become far more advanced. However. the developer PopTop Software has managed to strike a balance between making a realistic economic simulation and still keeping the game fun. The player can also decide how much he/she wants to

deal with on the business end and how much on the train management end. While Railroad Tycoon 3 might not be everyone's cup of tea, it is definitely a worthy successor to a classic and will keep enthusiasts busy for weeks.



(3) It's Railroad Tycoon

😊 in 3D

and is fun 8 Niche

3D can be daunting at first

8 Difficult for newcomers

reviewer: Moral Minority

developer: clever's game development [] publisher: atari [] distributor: megarom [011] 234 2680 rrp: R 399 [] genre: multiplayer FPS [] internet: www.t3war.com

DC review:



Incredibly Terminator 3: War of the Machines does even more damage to the reputation of games based on Hollywood movies - it's a terrible multiplayer focused interactive experience [can't rightly call it a game] based on a decadent movie oozing with CGI. There seems to be no escaping this cheap and dirty money making scam.

This game is astoundingly bad, I even went as far as downloading a brief interview with the developer to try and understand how anyone could release something so bad and still have the nuts to face the public in an interview. The



handful of levels where you can play against bots no story, no progressive levels and certainly no packed power. It's exactly like Battlefield 1942 minus the graphics, the physics, the atmosphere and the fun. The developers can't even get simple

things right such as option settings - in this game it is impossible to assign keys while they are currently assigned to other functions - absurd.

terminator 3:

The redeeming feature list is short; you can play either Tech-com or Skynet, you can drive vehicles and play as Arnold Schwarzenegger, although I bet he didn't Q&A this part of the Terminator franchise. There is also a claim on the box that he provided the motion capture and voice, hmm. But the skin on this potato is the fact that there is no local server for this game and connecting to one of the very few overseas servers is pointless if you live in South Africa.

In summary, stay far away - it's a real scare to think what some unwary Joe Public is going think about computer gaming after buying this trash. Atari has done damage to the whole industry here and as for the developers, you have to wonder if they even play games.

(3) In has Arnold

(a) It installs...

... and runs

Artificial intelligence

8 Play dynamic

8 Everything else



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EA Sports has established itself as a major player in the sport game genre. With the massive money-spinning franchises of Madden, NHL and the ubiquitous FIFA to name but a few, there is no reason why it cannot make a success of any sport title it sets its mind to. Unless that sport title happens to be cricket that is.

With Cricket 2004, EA had a golden opportunity to challenge perceptions that it cannot make good non-mainstream sport titles. Unfortunately, as with Rugby 2004, it missed the boat almost completely. The title has all the shortcomings of those that came before it, i.e. runs are still to easy to come by, scoring boundaries at will is par for the course and the graphics do not even come close to the more illustrious EA titles. Why then would anyone want to keep playing these titles? Well, it is probably because despite all its shortcomings, Cricket 2004 is probably the best cricket title available. At least the developers are borrowing some of the features of the other

EA sport titles like the squad management of Madden. Cricket 2004 also sees the introduction of more game modes that include Australian state and English county cricket tournaments and full seasons as well as a very good international tour mode. Players can choose from one of 11 tours that range from short (or long) tours of England and Australia and a challenging West Indian

tour. All game modes now incorporate a much larger



cricket 2004

pool of players to choose your squad from. Unfortunately, picking players other than the default team members sees the bugs creep in. In at least two instances, after having picked significantly different sides, the match statistics insisted that the default players were playing in the match. To make matters worse, replacing bowlers could lead to interesting scenarios. In the one game, I dropped Andrew Hall for Dewald Pretorius only to have Hall replacing him during my bowling innings!

While I suppose we should be grateful that EA still sees cricket as a worthy enough franchise to keep making games for, gamers should not be content receiving the sub-standard quality of game that we are becoming used to. Caveat emptor! [I see that word-a-day desk calendar is finally paying off, Ed].

- (3) International tour mode
- Low system requirements

reviewer: Iwan "Da3dalus" Pienaar

- Large player squads
- Graphics Buggy
- 8 Same problems as predecessors

developer: konami [] publisher: konami [] distributor: futronics [011] 313 1540 rrp: R 321 [] genre: sports [] internet: www.konami-europe.com



A lot has been said of Pro Evolution Soccer 3. According to those in the know, this title is the best football game on offer. Bold words considering the really impressive Electronic Arts FIFA 2004 offering has recently been released. So, how does this European offering stack up to the brash US "newcomer"?



pro evolution soccer 3

The first thing that potential buyers should note is that Pro Evolution Soccer 3 ships on a DVD. Nowadays it should not be too much of a problem since DVD combination drives have practically become the de facto standard on PCs. However, this could be bothersome for those gamers still stuck using standard CD drives. Perhaps the most annoying thing about this title, and one that almost forced me to stop playing it, is the fact

> that this is a badly done PlayStation 2 port. When the developers do not even bother removing the blatant console key configurations from the title you just know that this is going to be a bad experience. This is unfortunate since Pro Evolution Soccer 3 is a fun game to play. It comes across as an ideal football title for those interested in a (mainly) arcade experience. The graphics and sound are adequate and there are even some nice game modes to choose from. Of course, as soon as you play some of the training lessons, you will become infuriated again as the game gives you the PlayStation 2 buttons to press to complete the required moves. I did not find this offering to be anywhere close

to the supposed FIFA-killer many critics have made it out to be. If anything, it just shows how much Electronic Arts has invested in making sure its title is the best on offer. Perhaps Konami should have left this one on the PlayStation 2.



- C Fun
- (a) Ideal for the casual player
- 8 PS port
- 8 DVD drive required

nothing except their hardware

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Manufactured and distributed by Light Edge Technology



championship manager: **season 03/04**

Every now and again, a game reviewer gets a chance to look at a groundbreaking title in a specific genre. For first-person shooter specialists, this might be Doom 3 or Half-Life 2. For racing enthusiasts this could easily be Gran Turismo 4 or Need for Speed: Underground. In the football management stakes, this is Championship Manager: Season 03/04.

Kaizer Chiefs 0 0

Let me first get something clear. This game will not appeal to everyone. In fact, it might not even appeal to someone even vaguely interested in football management. No, Championship Manager is designed and marketed for the true enthusiast. This is not a title you install and play for an hour or two to forget about your worries. If anything, the high pressure environment of football management will increase your worries. It throws you headfirst into the role of the manager of any

> number of football teams across any number of leagues. I could really go into the mathematics and plethora of options involved in this title, but that would be pointless. If you are a true management simulation fan, then you will simply have to buy this title - it is that good. There are not any flashy graphics. In fact, the only graphics (if you don't count the legions of tables and menus) come in the form of a 2D (yes, that is two-dimensional) football field with round markers representing the players moving around. There is not even audio commentary. All the events of a match get shown in a news bar below the field. However, the craftsmanship of this title lies in its

statistics, options and realism. The only pity for fans of this franchise is that developer Sports Interactive and publisher Eidos have decided to go their separate ways after this title. So, enjoy the last title in the series.



Database size

Options 8 Niche

8 Can become overwhelming

The last Championship Manager

developer: radical entertainment [] publisher: vivendi universal [] distributor: nu metro [011] 340 9345 rrp: R 299 [] genre: driving platform [] internet: www.hitandrungame.com

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

the simpsons: hit & run

The big question that always revolves around this type of title is this: does it remain true to the spirit of the original upon which it is based? Rest assured, in the case of The Simpsons: Hit and Run, the answer is a resounding yes - more so than any Simpsons title ever before.

The Simpsons: Hit and Run is a totally irreverent, slightly silly and very funny game - much like the television series on which it is based. It is a big game, too, and introduces the player to the world of the



Simpsons (well, Springfield, mainly) in a way that has never been experienced before. The title is marketed as a driving game, but it is actually a bit more than just that. In fact, The Simpsons: Hit and Run is more a combination of driving and 3D platform gaming than just plain old driving. Items need to be collected throughout the seven large levels while various missions are completed. The missions generally revolve around the use of various vehicles, which can be obtained during the levels. Various sub-missions (generally races) can

also be completed, at the player's discretion. The only real complaint that can be found in this title is the fact that the camera is a bit dodgy at times; the mouse look function is rather roughly handled, and can get a bit

frustrating. Other than that, The Simpsons: Hit and Run is great fun, although those that aren't fans of the series' peculiar and rather particular sense of humour may find it

Simple controls and graphics true to the look of the series, as well as a script written by

the team behind the series and voice acting by the original cast members make for a great experience. The game does lack a little substance, but

who cares - it's the Simpsons, after all.

Challenging

Tons to do

Dodgy camera

reviewer: Ed "Miktar" Dracon

gha review:

sword of mana

Too long ago in the monochromatic legends of the Gameboy, existed one of Squaresofts earlier obscure yet unique efforts called Final Fantasy Adventures which

occasional burst of magic released from holding down a button for a specific amount of time. Finding new weapons gives you access to new areas previously unreachable, kill enough

can level your characters stats making them more powerful. Graphically as far as Action RPGs go, Sword of Mana overflows with vibrant colours despite some character animations feeling lacklustre. You might find yourself lost quite often; goal progression is vague at the best of times with little to no guidance in quests to help you on your way. More options in the way of multiplayer would have been a great addition: your companion in the single player (the character you did not choose to be) has the favourable intelligence of a wet brick, often getting killed or wasting magic needlessly.

There are options to set their Al, but

monsters and you



those seem to be ignored by the character. Despite all its flaws, Sword of Mana manages to present a fun and lengthy romp through a well-designed and colourful world.

would later hail the Super Nintendo sequel Secret of Mana. As far as remakes go Sword of Mana is an excellent overhaul of Final Fantasy Adventures, we would be lucky to see all remakes done this well. In Sword of Mana you're given a story from two perspectives, either as the male orphan who was forced into a slave life of gladiatorial combat or as a female descendant of the ancient Mana Clan whose magical heritage makes her a target for antimagic political factors.

Not much unlike its Secret of Mana predecessor, Sword of Mana lets you control your hero or heroine in a top-down perspective similar to The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past. Combat is equally simplistic, throwing away the turn-based approach for a more hack and slash system with the

Requirements

GB Advance | GB Advance SP

- Cong
- LOUIS
- Graphically sound
- Easy to get into
- **8** Confusing at times
- 8 Lack of guidance
- 8 Problems with combat

Summary

While not a landmark title such as Secret of Mana, there is no reason Sword of Mana can't become a favourite among Square-Enix fans despite its flaws and misgivings. A bit simplistic for some yet contains enough depth for a lengthy dive into a massive world.

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pc review:

pop idol

It took the world by storm. Millions of hopefuls around the globe descended on audition venues with the hope of getting the chance to prove their worth as a singer. Most of them didn't make it past that first step. However, if they are really desperate for pop stardom, there's a virtual solution to their problem...

Pop Idols really was a good idea (initially, anyway) and it



has reached the status of legendary programming for television. Now Codemasters have adopted the project, and the runaway success of the television series almost guarantees a hit PC title. But is the game any good? Truthfully, the best part of the game is the way that the spirit of the television show has been captured. There could have been no better way to do this game. Even the bastard judge Simon Cowell is present to give his snide remarks and harsh judgements on your performance.

The cel-shaded graphics and cartoon-like feel will appeal to the younger market targeted by this title, as will the majority of the songs chosen to be "performed" by the player.

The game dynamic is rather simple. Decide what to wear, and then perform your song, once for each of the various stages of the "show." The dressing up bit is a little girlish, but then again, let's consider the target market. Performing the song is simple enough (and has very little to do with talent). Hit the right key at the right time, basically, and your song will sound fine. Mess up, and the pre-recorded track is altered by the programme, making your singing sound worse with each mistake.

Pop Idol is a simple little game that will please those who really want to play it, and will irritate the living hell out of everyone else.



- True to the series
- A fun distraction
- Simon Cowell
- Short

64

developer: monte cristo [] publisher: monte cristo [] distributor: www [011] 462 0150 mp: R 299 [] genre: series simulator [] internet: www.montecristogames.com platforms: pc | ps2

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

8 Fairly dodgy graphics

pc review:

pop star academy

The PC version of the "Big Brother meets Pop Idol" television show does not really live up to the quality of the series... which, if you get down to brass tax, isn't saying much good at all.

Monte Cristo are known for their management games and this title is no different. The premise is that you run



the life of a Pop Star Academy finalist (or is that winner... I am not sure?). Through the game, you will need to ensure that your pop star learns new and better skills, in order to perform better, earn more money and become a bigger star. It sounds a bit like The Sims, I know and, when you start playing the game, you will notice that the similarity goes far beyond a coincidence

found in a vague description.
This game is the most blatant Sims knock off that I have ever seen. Add to that the fact that it is the worst of such plagiaristic titles, and you have a real idea of what the game mechanic is like. Sub standard graphics and a main character that is little more than an utter brat are the order of the day. Throw in a lacklustre feel and take away all personality (including voice acting) and you have an idea of how annoyingly bland this title is from the word go.

Monte Cristo have performed far better in the past, and should avoid the whole people management thing - it's been

done before, after all. But it goes further than that - the concept of the game is not one that works easily in an electronic format. It really is a poor attempt at capitalising on a television show that, in all honesty, should never have been made either.



- Fairly complex
- **8** Poor graphics
- 8 Sims knock-off
- **⊗** Bland

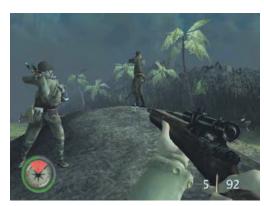
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ns2 review:

medal of honor: rising sun

The Medal of Honor series is widely regarded as being one of the best FPS franchises in recent times, particularly on consoles. Now the series, in its fourth instalment, moves the action from the traditional European frontlines of World War II to the Pacific Theatre, but does the game live up to the reputation of its predecessors?

In typical Medal of Honor style, Rising Sun throws you straight into the action at the outset of the game, once again creating one of the most memorable moments in gaming in the process. Medal of Honor Rising Sun establishes itself as having an undoubtedly linear path, both in terms of story line and level design. For the most part, each level has only one possible path leading through it, and needless to say, all your





objectives will be found along the way. Although this does remove the frustration of not being able to figure out where to go and what to do next, it also distances one from truly feeling involved in the game. One feels it could have been better executed if clear instructions regarding the objectives were given, while still forcing the player to use a measure of initiative to locate or complete them. Further compounding the problem of the play dynamic's ability to become tedious is the enemy Al. First-person shooters rely heavily on reasonable AI to make the experience a fulfilling one, but it appears something went terribly wrong with Rising Sun's enemy intellect - some enemies will stand in one spot in perfect serenity whilst you leisurely pick off their colleagues with a sniper rifle. Others will charge at you the instant you man a machine-gun nest, dashing blindly towards impending doom. Other notable glitches include enemies who are seemingly immune to 2 or even 3 headshots. Graphically, too, Medal of Honor Rising Sun falls short of the standard of visual excellence set by its

predecessors. The engine used for the game is starting to look very dated indeed, with locales looking far too basic and under-detailed, as well as an inconsistent frame rate. The characters, however, look quite reasonable, with the exception of a few ridiculous animations. For those who are willing to overlook its shortcomings, Rising Sun does still have a lot going for it. Once again, EA have done a sterling job of creating a historically accurate World War II shooter, with missions that see you visiting Thailand, Burma, Singapore and the Guadalcanal among others. Also present are the ubiquitous cinematic sequences preceding the missions, as well as extra content, including interviews with actual veterans of the war, something sure to please those with an interest in the topic. Aurally too, Medal of Honor is superb, once

again boasting the kind of epic and moving orchestral score that is synonymous with the series, not to mention convincing sound effects, and an easily acceptable standard of voice acting. Although Medal of Honor Rising Sun will probably appeal to those with a particular interest in World War II shooters and the war itself, fans of the series will probably be disappointed - Rising Sun had the potential to be yet another incredible chapter in the Medal of Honor series, by no means a bad title it's fraught with flaws that make the play dynamic utterly uninspiring, and simply ends up feeling like a very rushed and unpolished game, despite its merits.

Requirements

1-4 Players (Network/Multitap) | 117KB Memory | Analog compatible: sticks only Vibration compatible

- Historical accuracy
- Excellent sound
- Extra content
- @ Disappointing graphics
- Atrocious Al
- Rails to engage the player

Summary

Medal of Honor Rising Sun is a typical shooter in the mould of its predecessors, and offers a solid if slightly dull gaming experience, but sadly the lack of graphical innovation since the last instalment, and the uninspiring play-dynamic make it feel more like an exercise in wasted potential rather than the great title it could have







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s2 review:



the sims: bustin' out

reviewer: Walt "Shrvke" Pretorius

It's unlikely that Maxis will ever stop flogging the Sims horse. In fact, with Sims 2 on the way, there are a lot of new and exciting ideas

that are going to be introduced into the game. And there

is little doubt that the release of their new PlayStation 2 Sims title will have some kind of influence on the new PC title that we should be seeing not too much later this year.

One thing that sets the PS2 Sims titles apart from their PC forebears is the fact that the game itself is far less free form on the TV game platform. In fact, rather than being a "people simulator,"

the Sims on PS2 can be considered more of a management adventure title. Where the PC version allowed the player the freedom of advancing their virtual characters in a variety of different ways, the Sims on PS2 sets the player goals and unlocks content as the

game progresses. This was the case of the original PS2 Sims, and is the same with Sims Bustin' Out. It simply is not the same game.

That said, it must be pointed out that the Sims: Bustin'

\$41,661

Out is tremendous fun. It is a title that needs to be approached with no preconceived notions. That way, the good graphics, sound and comprehensive controls allow the game to shine. The title certainly does seem to be

aimed at a younger audience, although (with some of the subtle innuendo contained in the game) I doubt this truly is the case. New careers, new locations and new activities for you to partake in are on offer in this title, as well as the ability to undertake multiplayer games

(although the online versions of these games are impossible here in South Africa). On the whole, it is a fun and enjoyable title - not everyone's cup of tea, certainly, but good none the less.



- Cots to do
- Nice graphics
- Very entertaining
- 8 Not like pc version

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

developer: studio 33 [] publisher: scee [] distributor: ster kinekor [011] 445 7900 rrp: R 499 [] genre: driving [] internet: www.studio33.co.uk

ns2 review:

destruction derby: arenas

Roaring engines. Squealing brakes. Grinding gears. Screeching metal twisted out of shape. Ah, yes, it's time to return to the vehicular mayhem that is Destruction Derby.

It's been quite some time (in game development terms, anyway) since we last saw the world of Destruction

Derby on our TV screens. In fact, that was back in the day of PlayStation One... but rest assured, the absolute chaos of the original game has survived the transition to the next generation console wonderfully, to result in a fun game where the only rules are that the other guy needs to be trashed - and that you need to finish the race, more or less.

> Destruction Derby Arenas plays pretty much like previous incarnations of the game. The aim is to complete a race around a track while inflicting as much damage on your opponents as humanly possible. Additionally, impressive stunts (like jumps, skids, rolls and the like) are also rewarded. The biggest lack in this title lies in the multiplayer game. The reason for this is the rather close positioning of the camera to the player's car. This leads to a lot of the split screen player area being obscured. That said, the multiplayer mode of the game is still tons of fun. Destruction Derby Arenas is a rather mindless game. It is not one that takes much

thought, or even planning. Most actions taken by the player in this game are last second, depending on who you can smash into at the time. It's great fun, and a wonderful distraction that can last quite a long time, thanks to its large amount of locked levels and vehicles.



- Mindless fun
- Cond graphics
- Carron Lots to unlock
- 8 Iffy multiplayer

gcn review:

dragon ball z: budokai

It would be naïve to think that a corporation would not cash in on a popular license, but is it too much to ask for something decent? While Budokai is by far not the worst game to be made from a popular cartoon license, it does try very hard to be the worst not due to any significant problems but rather due to an astounding mediocrity. For those who know what I'm talking about, Budokai

FRIEZA

spans from the Saiyan Saga through the Cell Games, allowing players to re-enact their favourite battles from the series. Everything a fan would want is there, the signature moves. the characters and even re-created scenes from the series. Interestingly, all the voice acting is in original Japanese, English subtitles providing relief for the linguistically impaired.



In the end however, even the most avid DBZ fan will undoubtedly cringe at the horribly contrived combat system. Characters move as if they've forgotten how to walk, lengthy powerup sequences hinder the flow of battle. It's almost like the TV series if you're so

inclined, with certain fights taking ludicrous amounts of time to complete. A slight silver lining in terms of functionality, the moves of your character are collected from battle to battle in the form of capsules, capsules themselves are trade-able across characters and even players via memory cards. By using a blank template character, you can build up the ultimate fighter from scratch using the capsules. For a game based on a show known for its inordinate amount of explosions and special effects, Budokai

seems pale and it's graphical style rather bland. Occasionally Budokai manages to impress, the variety of game modes giving enough depth if you can stomach the faults in the combat and graphics.

Despite being a lacklustre title, Budokai will no doubt sell well attributed solely to the name and the fact that if you love something enough you can ignore all its faults. If you simply must have every piece of DBZ merchandise available, Budokai should be on your wish list.

If you're looking for a decent fighting game, Soul Calibur 2 may not have Dragons, but it's got the rest.



Summary

Genital related jokes aside, Budokai closely resembles the Dragon Ball Z series itself when it comes to pacing, but not sheer visual tact. Best left for the budget bin unless you just have to get your DBZ fix right now.

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ps2 review:



secret weapons over normandy

World War II is really gathering momentum within the electronic entertainment industry. While the burden of interest has rested on the first person, flight simulation and real time strategy genres, there is still a little space for expansion. Enter Secret Weapons Over Normandy...

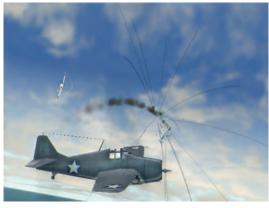
It's been a little while since we last saw a good arcade style flight based game. LucasArts have managed to produce just that with Secret Weapons over Normandy for the PlayStation 2. Basically the game deals with a multinational Allied flying squadron that takes the battle right to the Germans in a fast paced and action oriented title. Secret Weapons is mostly about flying. But it's not really a flight simulation - there's too little worrying about the intricate controls of an aircraft for it to qualify in that category. Instead it's all about action and, as long as you don't fly into the ground, the action is more

or less non stop. The "third person" view allows the game to show off its highly detailed aircraft models and rather pretty graphics. But not all the action takes place in the skies. A variety of environments, including anti-aircraft gun operation, makes for an interesting mix of challenges. The aerial missions are divided into shooting stuff that flies and bombing stuff that doesn't. A variable camera position helps make the bombing runs a little easier, and simple yet comprehensive wingman controls mean that the player should be able to manage in dog fights fairly well too.

Secret Weapons Over Normandy is a slick, action packed title, complete with a semblance of a story line and comprehensive, easy to master controls. If you're looking for a flight simulator, go somewhere else. But if action is your thing, this title will certainly serve you well

- Cots of variety
- Fast paced fun
- 8 Not overly realistic

80



developer: frontier developments [] publisher: scee [] distributor: ster kinekor [011] 445 7900 rp: R 349 [] genre: dog simulator [] internet: www.scee.com

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

ps2 review:

Watching my own dogs, I don't think I would mind having it easy like them: sleeping all day, getting fed and doing little more than

day, getting fed and doing little more than licking my own private parts. But it would seem that, according to this game at least, being a dog is a little more complicated than fetching sticks and digging up the flower beds...

A Dog's Life is something of a surprising title, as they seemed to have got the essence of "dog-dome" so right. In this game you control a dog setting out to rescue his beloved from the clutches of evil ne'er-do-well scientists. Jake,

our heroic beagle, has to progress through several levels and collect bones in order to progress to the game's conclusion

A Dog's Life is a fun title, most certainly aimed at a younger market but enjoyable for anyone that gives it a try. It runs something like a platform title with adventure elements, and poses a variety of challenges for the player. Whether it be doing tricks to get treats or seeking out scents in the first person "smell-o-vision" mode, the game can get quite challenging as the player controls Jake or a host of other dogs available (once they have been bested in one of many mini-games). The true triumph of this title is the almost perfect behaviour that

your dog can exhibit (including dropping a rather nasty parcel, digestive system allowing.) There isn't much story to the

dog's life

game really, but the fun comes from all the running, jumping and tricks that the player can perform. It's a pretty game, with a simple control system that can, at times, get a little annoying but holds up for the most part. This title is one that the whole family can enjoy.



- Nice graphics
- Good animation
- Dogs are cool
- The occasional control issue

82

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ps2 review:



Ghosthunter is the latest offering from the developers of the much-hyped but nonetheless flawed "Primal". Survival horror is a tricky genre to tackle, and although Ghosthunter looks the part, have SCEE Cambridge done enough to redeem their tarnished image?

In Ghosthunter, you play the part of Lazarus Jones, a rookie cop with an uncanny resemblance to Brad Pitt. On his first assignment, he's sent to investigate a call from an old and supposedly haunted school. While poking around the scene, Jones manages to unleash a





horde of evil spirits who proceed to make the most of their new-found freedom by abducting Jones's partner and causing various other forms of general chaos. With the help of a sophisticated computer Al program, as well as a friendly ghost named "Astral" (who is, at certain points, an additional playable character), Jones goes about capturing the multitude of ghosts he released in a bid to, as usual, save the world from unspeakable evil. Being somewhat of a hybrid between the Survival Horror and third-person adventure genres, the two most crucial elements of this sort of game are undoubtedly the play dynamic and the atmosphere. In terms of the play

> dynamic, although Jones is easy to control in "exploration mode", where he can run about quite freely, as soon as you draw your weapon, he slows to a snails pace as he creeps around with his gun raised. Although this makes it easier to accurately aim, Jones is nowhere near fast enough in this mode to avoid his enemies, who move at a

ghosthunter

rate of knots. Exacerbating this problem is the "hunting" mode, a first-person mode required to see certain of his enemies who are otherwise invisible. Whilst in this mode, Jones cannot be moved, leaving him a sitting duck. On the whole, these elements result in what is at times an excessively frustrating experience. In terms of atmosphere, however, Ghosthunter is right on the money. Spectacular graphics and stunningly realistic lighting effects, combined with eerie sound and a gripping story make Ghosthunter a riveting and thoroughly engrossing experience. Despite the combat system's obvious and often infuriating flaws, this is a very difficult game to put down. Although it is far from perfect. Ghosthunter's chilling atmosphere manages to compensate for the shortcomings of the play dynamic. making for a thoroughly enjoyable experience, provided this is a genre that appeals to you.

- Stunning visuals
- Excellent sound
- Gripping
- Poor combat system

reviewer: Adam "Madman" Liebman

8 Frustrating

74

developer: idol minds [] publisher: scee [] distributor: ster kinekor [011] 445 7900 rrp: R 499 [] genre: puzzle [] internet: www.mystreetgame.com

ps2 review:

Games bearing the Sony logo tend, as a rule, to be of a rather high standard, and as such, I had quite high expectations of My Street. Sadly, however, although the game manages to be entertaining, the experience is ultimately far too shortlived...

Firstly, it needs to be said that My Street is solely about mini-games - a collection of fast and generally frenetic affairs, best enjoyed in the company of others. Sony

have attempted to take this concept further with the PS2's online capabilities, which is where, if the hype is to be believed, the essence of My Street lies. Sadly, any PS2 game intended primarily for online play seems doomed to failure in sunny South Africa, and My Street is no exception. The game revolves around a neighbourhood inhabited by seven

children, each managing to superbly embody a racial or social stereotype in a manner that was certainly intended to be innocuous, but will most probably end up

offending a great multitude of people. Each child has their own game at which you can challenge them, including the ever popular RC car racing, a somewhat generic Tetris rip-off, dodgeball, volleyball, a magnetic marbles game, a livestock-herding puzzle game, and lastly, a lawn-mower racing game, the object of which is not just to complete laps quicker than the opposition. but to drive over as much grass (and as few flowers) as possible whilst doing so. Although many of these are blatant imitations of games we've seen before, they do

> nonetheless manage to be entertaining, and they are slightly more complex than typical minigame fare. Sadly, however, those 7 games are all My Street has to offer, and they quickly become tedious, particularly in singleplayer. Also on offer, though, is a single-player "story mode", which forces you to complete certain tasks (typical "fetch & return"

quests) to unlock the various mini-games. Unfortunately, though, not only is the mode very shortlived, it's also mind-numbingly boring. All in all, My

my street

Street can be entertaining, providing you've got a real person to play against, but there's just not enough on offer to make the experience worthwhile for very long, and I fear the same would hold true even in the online mode.



- Can be fun..
- But not for long
- 8 Online play not available here
- 8 Poor single-player mode



ps2 review:



THQ have solidified their reputation in recent years as being producers of top quality wrestling titles, and their latest, though it offers little innovation over last year's instalment, is no exception.

The SmackDown! series is arguably the finest console

wrestling series, managing to superbly combine depth and pace to make for very playable and entertaining titles, a trend they've continued with the fifth game, "Here Comes The Pain". The improvements over the previous title are few. but those that have been made do make a significant difference. The biggest change is that of the grapple system - each character now has four different grapples available, each activated by using the circle button in tandem with one of the directions. After engaging the grapple, four different moves are available from each grapple, and are carried out in a similar manner to initiating the grapple. Although it sounds slow and perhaps too complex, the

system manages to blend in seamlessly with the play dynamic. The other major difference

wwe smackdown! here comes the pain

between this title and the last is the reversal system two different buttons now control reversals: one for striking attacks, the other for grapple attacks, and both together for finishers, making for a more intuitive system than last year's. The season mode too has been slightly revamped - the concept is still identical to that of the last games, but there are more plotlines available, and aside from occasionally poor translation, they manage to superbly recreate the melodramatic and far-

fetched soap opera that is professional wrestling. Having said that, the play dynamic does still have its flaws, not least of which are the poor Al of both enemies and tag team partners alike. An annoyance, certainly, but thankfully it doesn't detract too much from the game as a whole. Visually, it's hard to fault Here Comes The Pain - the characters and arenas look like their real-life counterparts, and there are very few instances of slowdown. All in all, WWE SmackDown! Here Comes The Pain is certainly the best in the series thus far, and it manages to be an incredibly entertaining and enjoyable title, though it offers relatively little innovation over its predecessor. Both wrestling fans and the rest of us alike will probably enjoy Here Comes The Pain immensely. though casual gamers who already own the previous title may not find the improvements to be enough to warrant a purchase.

- Graphics
- Loads of variety
- Enjoyable
- 8 Little innovation over its predecessor
- 8 Load times

72

developer: evolution studios [] publisher: sce [] distributor: ster kinekor [011] 445 7900 rrp: R 349 [] genre: rally driving [] internet: www.wrc3-thegame.com

ps2 review:



Competition is always beneficial to the consumer, and the gaming industry is no different. Hot on the heels of Colin McRae 04 is yet another game trying to milk the rally-game cash cow, this time with an official license, but can it stand up to the competition?

Colin McRae 04 is certainly a difficult title to try to compete against, and at the outset, I thought the only advantage WRC 3 could claim over its opposition was that of having the official license, and hence both drivers and cars from the real campaign are present and accounted for, which will undoubtedly delight fans of the sport. It could also be argued that the experience delivered by WRC 3 is a more accurate representation (at least on higher difficulty levels) than its closest rival. Needless to say, once you graduate from "Novice" level, the game is excessively difficult, and it will take much patience and dedication before

you see any success on the higher levels, which is, on the one hand, frustrating, but it also does extend the game's longevity. One is left with the feeling, though, that the difficulty might have been ramped up a little more gently between different settings. In terms of physics, the controls are exceedingly responsive, perhaps even too much so, and it takes a fair amount of



reviewer: Adam "Madman" Liebman

wrc iii

practice to combat over steer, but once you become accustomed to them, the cars handle more or less as one would expect them to. Crash damage, however, is done to your car as a whole, rather than affecting specific areas, and the inability to repair your car between stages can make the game even more difficult and frustrating. Visually, WRC 3 excels with wonderfully detailed vehicles and tracks, and in terms of sound, the engine notes and co-driver assistance clips are realistic. How WRC compares to its competition (most notably Colin McRae 04) is largely a matter of personal opinion, and though I feel the latter is a better game, WRC 3 is undoubtedly a quality title, and definitely a reasonably accurate recreation of the sport, though the over-eager handling and high level of difficulty may not be to everyone's liking. If you can become accustomed to that, however, it'll certainly keep you busy for quite a while.

- Great graphics
- Lengthy gaming experience
- Can be too difficult
- 8 Controls take some getting used to



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PC CD-ROM





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gcn review

1080 avalanche

More than 5 years ago on the Nintendo 64 a snowboarding game managed to thrill those of us looking for a perfect run down the fine white powder of a snow-covered mountain. A sequel by most rights, 1080 Avalanche is a fine example of a snowboarding game yet lacks tiny flecks of polish to make it a truly great title. Graphically, 1080 fails to

impress yet manages to get the message across clearly.

Staple game modes such as Trick and Time-trial can keep you busy, but the main racing mode contains the most fun/frustration.

The tracks themselves are intense and often surprising, hidden avalanches and falling trees spice things up nicely but your opponent gives no quarter, allowing little to no time for an attempt at tricks. The trick system

> itself is an interesting deviation from the usual Tony Hawk inspired fare, but the disregard for the fun legacy system may irritate some people. For example, holding your jump before you reach the lip of a halfpipe is normal, except in 1080 you can only hold the jump for a limited time, forcing you to have more timing than is really necessary. The combo system itself is also rooted deeply in timing; you can only achieve a combo if you do a grab at exact intervals while in the air after a perfectly timed jump. The norm these days in sporting titles, 1080 features a full set of hard-rocking music, popular bands strutting and strumming as you pummel down the mountain yet again.

The snowboarders themselves can actually take damage, if you run into too many trees or squirrels you will lose a life, lose all 3 and you will have to start the whole competition from the start - highly frustrating, yet more realistic than most sport titles. If snowboarding is your thing this is worth a look, but SSX3 still retains the

- Challenging
- Too challenging
- 8 Infuriating combo system

highest regard for the genre. Good selection of music

reviewer: Ed "Miktar" Dracon

developer: nintendo [] publisher: nintendo [] distributor: futronics [011] 313 1540 mp: R 499 [] genre: racing [] internet: www.nintendo.com

acn review:

DAMAGE ...

kirby air ride

Everyone's favourite pink something races on to the GameCube with one of the more obscure racing titles since someone slid down a snowy mountain on a kitten [you need help, Ed]. Kirby Air Ride tries to combine innovative minimalism into a full-featured racer that's surprisingly easy to pick up, yet neigh impossible to master. If you've got the need for speed (while listening to what seems to be 80's show

tunes), or just a general desire to swallow your friends and then spit them out again, look no further. While it may sound like a marketing ploy, Kirby Air Ride does in fact feature a 'one button' control scheme, you only ever use the big green 'A' button (the analogue is still

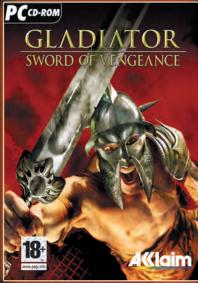
used for steering). Initially this may seem arbitrary at first but it has powerful thinking behind it. For the most part, the A button is used to 'power boost' around corners; holding down the button causes you to slow down but charge your boost meter, so you can enter a corner sliding and then speed out the other side. The other side of the coin involves swallowing your enemies in Kirby's trademark style so as to copy or gain their abilities. The favourites like Sword and Spike are all there, allowing you to dish out punishment on your opponents while speeding along the impressive rollercoaster-inspired courses. Since you don't have to worry about things like acceleration (it happens automatically), most of your focus lies in trying not to hit obstacles that will slow you down.

Aside from the usual race mode called Air Ride, a psychotically fun Top Ride mode presents the action from a top-down perspective allowing for rather go-kartlike action with the addition of the various power-ups. City Trial mode takes the battle action from the Air Ride mode and turns it into a race for power-ups, players get to wander a massive city environment complete with forests and volcano, finding new warp-star vehicles to try out before special events happen such as a full-on

Battle Royal. Insane amounts of locked content inclusive, Kirby Air Ride may appear cute and cuddly, but will most likely chew you up and spit you out, winning the race of quality title.



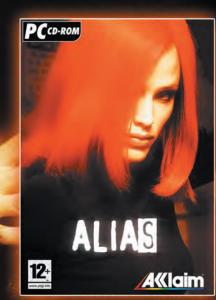
- Simplistic/Complex racing action
- C Stylish and polished
- Inclusion of multiple play modes
- 8 Tough challenges
- 8 Not for everyone



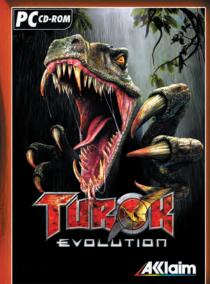
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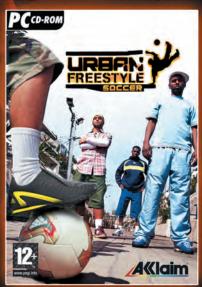
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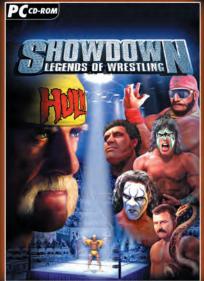
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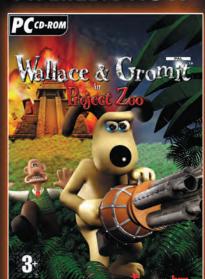
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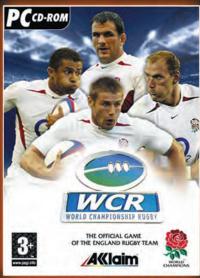
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GET READY TO PLAY.

I remember back at Wits one of my Economics tutors drumming into us fresh-faced students the explanation of the law of diminishing returns. Put simply, this rule declares that the more you pay for a particular product, the less benefit you receive over the lower-priced versions per Rand spent.

In motoring, for instance, a car with a 10 second 0-100 km/h time costs around R100 000 today. A five second time can be bought for R350 000, but a time of four seconds or less will set you back R1 million at least. That's a huge price delta for a mere second off this benchmark measurement. A perfect IT example is the P4 Extreme Edition, which costs four times the amount

a 3.06 GHz P4 chip does, but performs a mere 10 - 15% better. And graphics cards, you'd think, would be no exception. The product on test here, however, seems to disprove this theory. Targeted at the budget-conscious consumer, the Asus V9560XT is based on the NVidia GeForce FX 5600XT family of offerings and claims to offer high levels of

gaming performance at a much lower price point than the high-end and high-cost graphics adaptors which steal the headlines in any group benchmark. Let's look at some benchmark results to see why I say

this card doesn't follow the law of diminishing returns. In the ubiquitous 3DMark 03 bench, the best score achieved by this card was a rather lacklustre 1473, and this with the 53.06 Forceware drivers which were still in beta at the time. With the included Asus Enhanced drivers, based on the 52.16 WHQL-certified driver package, this drops to an even less impressive 1258.

Now, a card which costs just less than three times the price of this offering, I shall leave out the precise details of which product in this price category I'm speaking about, scores some 5800 in this bench. That's around four times the performance, meaning that ultimately you get more fps per Rand spent from the

significantly more expensive option, the opposite of what should have happened if the diminishing returns rules applied.

These kinds of results were consistent across the range of benchmark suites I employed. The Gun Metal 2 DX9 benchmark utility showed 6.26 fps with 4X FSAA

enabled, and 9.33 fps with 2X FSAA. The pricier adaptor achieved 22 fps using no less than 6 samples. The frame rates achieved by the FX 5600 would make this game title unplayable.

Aquamark 3, which uses both DX8.1 and DX9 shading routines, has a loose guideline which states that anything higher than 20 000 points

represents the kind of performance that should run all new games at their highest detail settings. The FX 5600 scores 11 541, meaning that most newer titles will need to be run at half detail to deliver playable frame rates. This outcome is supported by the newly-released Far Cry demo. A resource-heavy piece of software, to be sure, but on this offering lagged to death on even the lowest detail settings. Prince of Persia, Sands of Time, is playable on this card but with lag issues that can become annoying, while even the arcade-like LOTR Return of the King sees frame rates drop to below 7 in



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PRICE: TBA

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big battles. And X2: The Threat? Well with an average 20 or so fps with no FSAA, I wouldn't recommend even trying it on a machine equipped with this card. At the end of the day, cards like this one are needed to keep cash-strapped gamers playing new titles, but they certainly aren't satisfying compared to pricier options. I know it's unfair to compare the two, but it seems to me that being budget-conscious is harming the gaming experience of these consumers more than they might be aware, and that graphics-card vendors are actually exploiting this large segment of the market to drive their sales figures up, without providing the benefits these buyers really want.

Newer games all suffer lag

As a final point of interest, the Asus FX 5600 is beaten by NVidia's last-generation flagship, the GeForce 4 Ti 4600, in almost every test, and what's more barely beats out the even older GeForce 3 Ti 500. So if you have a card similar to this one and want all the latest and greatest games running better, save up and go for one of today's flagship cards.

Hitachi Deskstar 180 GXP

When it comes to storage, among other things in life, size is the prime consideration, right? Well, unless you're looking at sacrificing Gigabytes of space for SCSI performance and price, that and brand loyalty are often the deciding factor when looking for a new IDE drive.

This Hitachi Deskstar 180 GXP might not score points on pure capacity, especially considering the monster drives of 200 + GB available today, but it actually performed admirably for what is essentially a "workhorse" model IDE drive. It makes use of fairly ordinary, average mechanicals, but as with similarly-named products which were still made by IBM at the time, this Hitachi Deskstar delivers an

immediately robust impression and excellent data throughput to boot. Running at a rotational speed of 7200 RPM with standard 2 MB cache, this Deskstar delivered data consistently at a rate of 36 690 kB/s, as measured by SiSoft Sandra Professional 2003. This is quicker, according to this benchmarking application,

than a two-disk ATA 66 RAID setup, and just barely slower than an Ultra 160 SCSI drive. Due to the way that drive mechanicals work, some products can suffer from severe slowdown once filled to near capacity, but the Deskstar continued to pump out just under 36 000 kB/s even when less than 1 GB was available. It's certainly quicker than the older 120 GB drive from a competitive manufacturer I run my system off, in every operation. Short burst transfers and sustained throughput operations are all completed faster on the smaller Deskstar. The quoted seek time of 8.5 ms and even more impressive 4.17 ms

average latency are what drive these excellent results. What's more it achieves this throughput quietly, and without excessive heat generation, even after hours of continuous stress.

I was concerned when first connecting the Deskstar. An initialisation failure during formatting had me thinking that perhaps Hitachi had just kept the evocative brand name and replaced the mechanics with less efficient systems. But this glitch proved a cable problem, and once sorted the Hitachi drive was able to demonstrate that it lives up to the legacy of reliability mixed with performance created by earlier Deskstar offerings.

REVIE	WED BY		
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett			
PLUS	MINUS		
Good performance Low noise Reliable construction	Not enough capacity, although priced right.		

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000 PRICE: R 500.00 INTERNET: www.asus.com

ASUS DigiMatrix

Multimedia PCs (or entertainment hubs if you listen to the marketing people) are not a new phenomenon. Ever since PCs were first used for watching movies, listening to music and playing games, computer manufacturers sought to bring them into the living room. ASUS is the latest company to enter this market with the release of its DigiMatrix digital entertainment PC.

I have to admit that when I hear the term digital entertainment PC a feeling of dread ripples through my body. Perhaps it is just me, but I simply cannot see the market for these devices.

The DigiMatrix is a case in point. This baby will set you back in excess of R3 000. Not bad, considering that a decent PC costs around R5 000. However, the DigiMatrix is only a barebones system. This means that you will still have to buy memory, a hard drive, a processor and the operating system software of your choice to be able to use this system. What is more, the DigiMatrix does not have any AGP or PCI slots on its motherboard. Scratch using this system as a gaming rig then. There is no DDR400 memory support and the front side bus only supports up to 533MHz and the hard drive will have to be ATA 133 as there is no Serial ATA support. The Asus motherboard used in the DigiMatrix (a P4SQ derivative) is very cramped due to the form-factor of the box.

On the positive side, the DigiMatrix is beautiful to behold. It features a false front-panel that gives the impression that this device is a normal hi-fi or DVD system. When closed, the panel has a volume control knob as well as a display to show the system temperature. Once open, it gives the user access to a myriad of connection points (see box elsewhere on the page).

The DigiMatrix ships with a plethora of cables, a remote control (batteries not included) and a couple of CDs containing multimedia software. Perhaps the best feature of the system is the fact that you can play CDs on it without having to boot it up. This is a boon as it gives the impression that it is in fact a multimedia system.

Unfortunately, the DigiMatrix remains a glorified bare-bones box that requires someone with at least some technical skills to complete the setup. If the DigiMatrix is marketed to general consumers, it will fail because of this. Even if it is marketed to PC enthusiasts it will still fail as it offers nothing new to the market except a pretty box.

Connection points:

8xUSB 2.0 IEEE1394 S/PDIF S-Video TV-out VGA RJ45 (2 ports) Wireless LAN 6 channel audio out Line-in/out

PS/2 Keyboard and mouse

MIC/Head phone

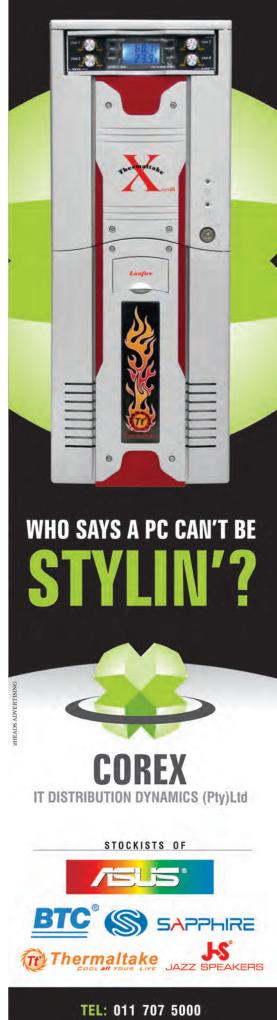
Iwan "Da3dalus" Pienaar PLUS MIN

Good-looking Tuner mode Expensive Need to buy hard drive, memory, cpu and software

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--- march 2004 NAG magazine

Vitesta DDR 500 RAM

While quoting the clock frequency of your CPU might be the equivalent of slapping your opponent in the face with a gauntlet, showing off the heat-sinks on your DDR 500 RAM modules would surely be like bringing a mini-gun to a boom-stick festival. You may even need a transparent case and neon inserts just to be able to show them off properly without the danger of having someone drooling on them.

Yes, A-Data Technology of Taiwan has created some of the quickest DDR RAM available on the planet today, naturally focussed on the gaming market where the craving for more performance is the most insatiable. Called Vitesta DDR 500, these modules are designed to look as sexy as the technical specifications sound. Sporting red heat-plates on both sides of the module, this 512 MB offering looks absolutely great when slotted in. Just how does 500 MHz DDR perform though? That's a far more complicated question.

To cut a very long and mathematical story short, RAM running at such a high clock frequency should only actually make a noticeable difference to system performance if the FSB of the CPU can be clocked up to the same frequency. Without being able to clock the FSB up to 250 MHz in this case, clocking the RAM to this speed will only introduce wait-states which will ultimately hinder performance, bringing the faster chips down to levels of performance similar to 400 MHz RAM or even less. Having said that, testing this RAM showed that the A-Data offerings are indeed capable of an astonishing 3948 MB/s bandwidth capacity while still running a 400 MHz FSB. This translates to a vast subjective performance improvement, and the PC feels so responsive and quick in Windows that there was no doubt this memory had made a major difference. Ultimately, this Vitessa RAM is the fastest memory this side of the very dodgy RDRAM platform, but while it will improve your PC subjectively it'll only really show it's true capabilities when you start over-clocking your system on the whole beyond 400 MHz. They are great LAN-party talking pieces, though.



	•			
REVIEWED BY				
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett				
PLUS	MINUS			
Looks absolutely great Great for over-clocking -Huge bragging rights	Doesn't quite unleash true 500 MHz potential Pricey			

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000 **PRICE:** R 1320.00

INTERNET: www.corex.co.za

Gigabyte 3D Cooler-Pro

And so the cooling race continues. Everyone and his monkey are getting on the band wagon to cool down our ever hotter machines. Some folks, though, get really good ideas and have a name to back it up, to boot.

While a lot of research and design goes into a wide number of PC related fields, CPU coolers seem to get left behind. This doesn't mean alternate ways of CPU cooling, like liquid systems. We are talking about fan systems here.

The Gigabyte 3D Cooler-Pro is probably one of the strangest CPU coolers we have ever seen. The device is large, and consists of a high density fin structure with embedded heat pipes, all set above a base plate and surrounding a turbine style blower.

The idea behind the 3D Cooler-Pro is fairly new, and quite revolutionary, if you'll excuse the pun. The whole concept is that heat is dissipated by the fins in all directions. The fins themselves allow air to flow between them, which takes care of heat rather effectively. Heat is delivered to the fin structure via 4 heat pipes, which are highly conductive and are structured to pull heat away from the base plate. Additionally, air is moved by a turbine style blower with a speed variable between 2000 and 4000 rpm. Obviously, the faster the fan speed, the

louder the fan. The noise levels range from 20 dBa at slower speeds right through to around 40 dBa at the higher settings. That's pretty loud, but still not louder than some fans available on the market. Fan speed can be controlled via a knob that can be mounted in either a 3.5" floppy slot, or a PCI slot (the latter option will require a bit of work, but nothing too difficult, as the knob comes fitted to the 3.5" bay).

One of the benefits of this device is that air is moved over components around the CPU, which aids in keeping the entire system cooler. Additionally, modders will like the cooler because the entire top section lights up with a bright blue colour.

Installation of the 3D Cooler-Pro is quick and easy. Clips are provided for fitment to P4, K7 and K8 motherboards. It weighs in at 430g, which is pretty heavy for a CPU cooler. but not overly so.

While it is not the most effective way of cooling a CPU (no mere fan system is) this is a perfect way for those who are not going to over-clock their machine to cool things down.

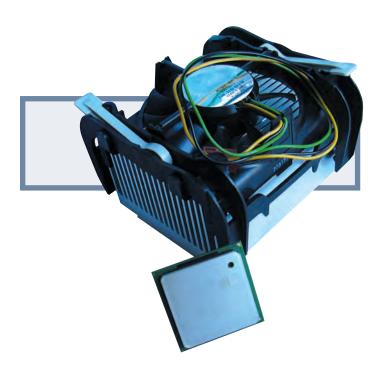
In fact, short of a lengthy water cooling installation, the 3D Cooler-Pro is about the best CPU cooler we have seen in quite some time. Its well worth the effort and it looks good too.



REVIEWED BY			
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius			
PLUS	MINUS		
Effective	Heavy		
Looks cool	Can get noisy		

SUPPLIED BY: Rectron (011) 203 1000 PRICE: TBA INTERNET: www.gigabyte.com

Celeron 2.7 GHz



While Intel's latest Prescott Pentium 4 chips continue to make headlines across the Web, with very negative reports on the performance of this new core, we had a look at the low-end of the market where the company has continued to steadily extend its budget range of processors, the Celeron, ever upwards in terms of clock frequency.

Originally designed as a cut-price and lower specified version of the flagship Pentium chip range, the Celeron CPU has suffered for a number of years in the enthusiast market in particular. The original Celeron was a badly implemented chip, after all, and got a lot of flak from press the world over as a result. The latest offerings, however, stretch all the way up to 2.8 GHz on a 400 MHz system bus. On review here is the 2.7 GHz part, just one step down from the fastest available affordable processor from Intel today. Using an Intel 845 chipset motherboard, I was impressed with what this chip actually delivers. Running a variety of platform benchmarks including SYSMark 2002 and SiSoft Sandra Professional 2003 showed the Celeron to be performing at a level similar to its 512K L2-cache P4 cousin running at 2.6 GHz. Let's not kid ourselves, however. In the subjective, day to day operations of your PC, there are still those moments of noticeable lag which characterise Celeron-based systems. But at these kinds of clock speeds, they

REVIEWED BY				
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett				
PLUS	MINUS			
Decent performance	Low cache still results in operational lag			
Amazingly affordable Low heat generation	Not really meant for gaming			

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000 PRICE: R 900 INTERNET: www.asus.com aren't the irritant that they were on older 1 GHz parts. You'll certainly notice them in an epic LAN battle, but will experience barely a moment's pause now in office productivity suites. The BapCo benchmark awards this Celeron with 232 marks overall, while SiSoft Sandra shows a Dhrystone ALU score of 6773 MIPS. Both of these figures position the chip a few points below the P4 2.6 GHz (without Hyper-Threading) or Athlon XP 2800 + . Impressive, especially considering the performance deficit I've come to expect from these processors.

Of course, the newest versions of the equivalent P4 chips now sport 800 MHz FSBs and HT technology, which widens the delta between the lower-range offering and the flagship Pentium 4 brand. Also, the prices of P4 chips at this kind of clock frequency are fairly affordable already and steadily coming down. For a corporate workstation where pure power is not a concern, however, the Celeron offerings are still the closest you'll come to 3 GHz performance for well under R 1000. Even gamers on a particularly tight budget will appreciate the kind of computational power such a clock speed represents, even hobbled by the smaller L2 cache and fewer transistors.

If nothing else, the 2.7 GHz Celeron part on test here represents a healthy step towards establishing a decent budget PC platform. Sure Celerons and Durons have been on the market for

some time already, but neither has managed to perform well enough to be considered for any system being used as more than an office workstation. Now, however, were I struggling to run more than 10 Al in Battlefield 1942 even with a decent graphics card, but had just over a grand to my name, I might actually consider these high-frequency Celerons rather than just attempt to save up another thousand.



Tired of having no desk space? Getting bored with the generic-look

of desktop systems?

If so, check out the the ASUS Pundit desktop barebone system.

STOCKISTS OF





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Thermaltake Wingo & Damier Towers

The latest in Thermaltake's case range, the Wingo and Damier series, aims to extend the company's already great reputation as far as out-of-the-box system cases

Cosmetically there's little difference between the Damier

and Wingo, at first sight at least, but a Damier case is

at least a third more expensive than the Wingo. This is

because it boasts an LCD temperature and fan display,

bay (not to mention the two new large fan adjustment

an aluminium front face. The cases share a few

fans (including the two fans that overhang your

as well as the customary fan controls installed in a front

knobs). And unlike the Wingo cases, Damier boxes have

Thermaltake casing standards as well - several internal

motherboard), external USB, Firewire and sound ports, a

simple clip-in motherboard tray, clips to hold your PCI

and AGP cards in place (meaning you don't need to

screw them in), clips to mount your hard drives and

into, not to mention maintain the interior and be sure that your machine has proper air circulation.

such without screws, a large side window,

illuminating fans, a case lock and other features

that make these cases great to install hardware

Generally I'm a Thermaltake case fan and so far I haven't encountered anything in the same availability and price range that you can compare to the series. So instead both the Wingo and Damier cases can only really be placed side

to side with what

Thermaltake have already brought out. Now this might seem a bit unbalanced, and it would have been if Thermaltake actually improved on the case's design, but they didn't. Strictly speaking, the cases are just a minor update to the Xaser series - which is fine by me, since they aren't charging anything extra to what a new Xaser would have cost you anyway. What confuses me, though, is how the designers managed to skip on some great additions made with the recent Skull cases. The first element is that these cases use plastic mounting brackets, as opposed to the Skull's aluminium brackets. Granted, once the drive is mounted, it makes no difference, but the plastic mounts kept falling off the

> hard drives when handling them. The new cases also moved the mounting space for the drives to the bottom of the tower, facing to the side. In order to get my IDE cable to work with this without bending awkwardly, I could only mount two drives there (and anyone who owns a case like this surely will have more than two drives

at a time). The case does have additional mounting spaces, but you have to use screws there. Granted it's far easier to get to drives now, but couldn't they have moved the mounting box a bit higher? That said, perhaps placing three drives on top of each other isn't good when you consider heating. Here the Skull at least had a fan mounted on the right side of the case - circulating air over your drives -

something neither of the new cases have. There is a front-mounted fan for this, but it doesn't cool the drives that are sitting slightly higher in the case.

All these are personal taste, unlike the new card-mounting clips. Apparently they are more secure than

those used in the Skull, but unless your PCI or AGP card

is top-level to the mounting bracket, the clip can't close - no matter what I tried I could not secure my 5900 FX (with the notoriously large cooling box) or my aging TV card. A colleague managed to get his 9800 Pro mounted, but he had to remove the entire plastic bracket holder first, mount the card, and place the bracket back. And all this could have been avoided if they stuck to the original clip design.

Overall, these aren't bad cases and most of the problems can be sidestepped with a bit of effort here

It's just a pity that compared to their other cases, Thermaltake seem to have taken a design step backwards.





REVIEWED BY

Roomy interior

Easy to build into Quality case

Annoying card clips Not as pretty as other Xaser

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000 PRICE:Wingo: R 1010.00 | Damier: R 1615.00 INTERNET: www.corex.co.za

Viewsonic VP181b LCD Screen

A picture says a thousand words. And in this case that picture will cost you a bit more. But such a pretty picture it is...

I adore LCD screens. For one, over the years they've actually become very good, with respectable refresh rates and more affordable prices, though obviously nowhere close to the cheap rates of standard screens. They also occupy much less space on your desk and the display is crystal clear - overall a far more attractive option than the conventional desk bulks that we use for monitors.

This model is a decent offering in the field, but that's what you'd expect from the Viewsonic brand. It has a steel base and pillar which can be adjusted up and down, while the screen itself can tilt forwards and backwards, as well as rotate sideways if you need a portrait view (something you can activate using the supplied software).

It supports both conventional and digital outputs -

something all major graphics cards have these days - and it has a USB hub built in with support for four ports. The menu interface is simple enough and everything seems cosy.

It's not the best gaming screen, though. That's not to say it isn't good for games - the refresh rates are good and the image is sharp and vibrant. The screen does use slightly different sizes for its resolutions, though, causing some games to have black bars on the side, since the image doesn't fill the whole screen. In other words it doesn't remove part of the game screen - the game screen just doesn't fill everything. Some titles, such as all the shooters I tried, don't have this problem and seemed very happy to work on the screen.

Apart from that nitpicking, it's a decent LCD monitor with a crisp display (one that will make it very hard for me to go back to my conventional 19"). The price will set you back a bit, but the quality is well above any conventional 19 inch you'd get.





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The PlayStation console is undoubtedly the most popular console around, so what better excuse to have an entire roundup dedicated to some of its accessories.

Console gaming is growing at a steady pace and even though, personally, it is not my platform of choice, the concept behind console gaming and the myriad of titles available (especially for the PSOne and PS2) makes it a great choice for the avid gamer. Sadly, if you are any type of gamer or technology junkie (like me), then the standard product is just not satisfying enough. We always want to expand and buy bigger and better accessories, sometimes we even just buy something because it is available and it looks cool (if you fall under this category I would advise you to skip the next couple of pages). It is for this reason that the peripheral market is such a booming one, new controller designs and wireless technologies makes for interesting and useful add-ons to our beloved consoles. The most popular accessories for the PS2 are game controllers and steering wheels and that is why the majority of products I am reviewing this month are just that. I did not bother much with minor accessories such as memory cards as these are readily available and they serve only one purpose, to provide a storage space for you to save your game. You will notice there is no benchmarking column this month, this is simply because there are no real benchmarks to which to compare this type of product to. I simply installed and played with it (man, I love my job) and in this H@rdcor3 roundup you can

writer: Tom "Fr00tC@k3" Taylor

read my findings.





Score definitions box:

- 50% Way below average, look elsewhere
- 60% Below average but for a person on a tight budget this should suffice
- 70% Average, most people will be happy with it
- 80% Above average, buy this if you want better than the standard
- 90% Great product, works superbly, great features, my recommendation
- 100% Said company probably bribed me, "the ultimate product"

Logitech Cordless Controller

The Logitech Cordless Controller is a sleek looking PS2 controller which, as the name indicates, is a wireless or cordless device. The button layout is much the same as your traditional PS2 controller although the positioning might be slightly different. This controller also features one of the sturdiest designs I have seen in a while and I would much rather make use of this controller than the one bundled with the PS2. Its cordless transceiver works on a frequency of 2.4 GHz and the controller itself needs 4 AA batteries to power it. I like the fact that the transceiver which plugs into the PS2 has a cord which allows you to place it above your television for a greater operating distance. Sadly this controller is a little on the large side and people with small hands will find this controller not as easy to use. Seeing that I have fairly large hands this controller is comfortable to use and all the buttons are easy to reach.



Logitech Action Controller

Right out of the box you will notice Logitech's fine workmanship on the Action Controller. It looks extremely funky and has a very futuristic feel to it, in terms of extra features it does not offer any but as a standard PS2 controller this one should be on your short list. When holding this controller it feels very sturdy and almost seems unbreakable. On each of the grips you will find a soft rubber padding making this controller very comfortable to use, especially for long periods of time. These grips are also slightly longer than the controllers bundled with the PS2 which also makes it more comfortable to hold. There is only one negative about this controller - its analog stick is a bit higher than other controllers' I have come across; personally this is not a big issue but I can see that for some people it might be a little problematic in terms of operating it accurately. All in all this is a great controller which is very well priced. If they were to create this controller in a wireless model I will be a very happy gamer.



Saitek PX5000

The first noticeable features on this controller are its LCD and the big silver rings around the analog sticks. The LCD on this controller is a first for console controllers and is a necessity with this controller's best feature, being able to program a series of in-game moves and being able to store these for future use. By using the macro situated right below the L1 and L2 buttons you are able to record a series of key presses, these can then be recalled at any stage during the game to perform special or trick moves. Another funky, yet less useful feature is that you can program it to display a name up to 6 characters in length to customize your PX5000 controller. The silver rings I mentioned earlier are another incredibly useful feature, by rotating these rings you are able to lock the axis on which the analog sticks are able to move. Sadly I found these axis locks to be a bit finicky. If these would be easier to switch into position they would be a lot more valuable. The feel is not bad at all and the only gripe I had was with the position of the shoulder buttons. Looking at its functionality though, this controller is top of its class.



Internet:

www.saitek.com

Features 75 Value for Money 70 Desirability 65 Pros: Comfortable to hold Cons: The wheel limits its capabilities Supplied By: Edutain Distribution [011] 882 1735 FRP: R360 Internet: www.edutain.co.za

X Tecnologies Racing Shock 2

This is the first product from a company called X Tecnologies I have seen and I am glad to report that I am impressed. This particular controller is called the Racing Shock 2 and is aimed at racing games. The controller has a wheel and two buttons in its place and the layout of the other buttons are much the same as those found on other PS2 controllers. The wheel can be used to control a vehicle in a racing game and I was slightly impressed by it as it offered a reasonable amount of resistance which made it control the vehicles a lot more accurately. Next to the wheel are two buttons which are perfectly suited for gear up and gear down controls. The round design of the Racing Shock 2 made this a very comfortable controller to use as my index fingers could lean against the controller at all times. All in all this is a fine controller, its vibration motors were not the best I have felt to date but should be sufficient for most gamers. The only concern I had was that this controller is a bit limiting in that there are no analog sticks but if you drive vehicles a lot in your games then this controller is definitely for you.



Controller

After having used the Saitek PX5000, all the other controllers seemed to be just another controller. In all fairness though, I must admit that I was impressed by the products produced by X Tecnologies, which seems to produce sturdy controllers. I was a bit baffled by the name of this controller but soon realized it was just a "marketing thing". This controller has little that sets it apart from the standard PS2 controller, it looks and feels much the same. X Tecnologies got a bit creative and designed the action buttons in a translucent plastic with a rubber shape on the inside, I must admit it actually looks nice. The D-Pad looks and feels a bit clumsy, but after getting used to it, it is quite responsive. The grips on this controller are comfortable to hold, although some soft rubber padding would have been welcome and it would have made the Dark Rumble 2 stand out a bit more. Sadly, even though this is a very nice controller it lacks anything extra and at its current retail price I would much rather opt for the Logitech Action Controller.



X Tecnologies Arcade Stick 2

Now this brings back memories. The Arcade Stick 2 is one of the few arcade style joysticks available for the PS2 and it is to say the least, superb. The button layout on this controller makes them easy to reach and the buttons themselves look very funky as they are translucent with a rubber inner indicating the button's function. The only thing I would have liked to see changed is the position of the function buttons. These might have been more usable if they were within thumb reach. On the far right hand side of this controller you will see a mode button, this allows you to switch the functionality of the joystick between the 8-way PS2 D-Pad style or the traditional arcade-joystick style. The difference being that when it is switched to operate in D-Pad mode it will only have 8 operational directions. I particularly liked the fact that the Arcade Stick 2 feels a bit heavy as this makes it much sturdier should you place it on a table or on the floor. I also appreciated the fact that it has a built in vibration motor. I really enjoyed using this controller and for fighting games this controller is a must.



Blaze Scorpion3

There are a couple of features which make this gun stand out from its competitors, firstly, it is the only gun currently which supports televisions up to 100Hz. The second great feature of this light gun is it's built in laser sight which you are able to calibrate and switch off if you wish. The gun feels very comfortable to hold and is not particularly heavy, it also features a D-Pad at the back of the gun which is easily reachable with your thumb. On the left side of the gun are three buttons which include a select and start button and on the right are two action buttons. Sadly these buttons are just out of reach of my thumb and for somebody with small hands there would be no chance of coming close to touching them. I really enjoyed using this gun, the laser sight is a great feature and made things feel a little more realistic. Its estimated retail price is really not bad either and I suggest you check this light gun out.

Light Gun

Value for Money 90

Features 90 Pros: Laser sight Cons:

Two action buttons which are out of reach

Supplied By: Bowline 0800 203-048 FRP: R339

www.xploder.net

Internet:

Desirability 90

PS2 G-con 2

The G-con 2 is the official PS2 light gun which is manufactured by Namco. The G-con 2 is comfortable to hold but is a little smaller than its predecessor, the G-con 45, for the PSOne. The one thing I noticed about this light gun was that the A and B buttons have been pushed further back, making it a tad difficult to operate with your left hand if your right hand is holding the gun, but I suppose as with any change, it just takes some getting used to. On the back of the gun is a D-Pad, which I must admit, I have not found a use for on any of the PS2 games I have played. One of the things I enjoyed the most about this gun is the button situated at the bottom of the grip, this simply needs to be pressed to reload your gun in a game, simulating the reloading of a clip. The PS2 G-con 2 is a great gun which, as with most products, has its plusses and minuses and sadly, one of them is the fact that this light gun will not work on newer televisions which uses a 100Hz refresh rate, I also missed the laser sight which is a feature on the Blaze Scorpion3.



Logitech Netplay Controller

The Logitech Netplay Controller is the one peripheral which is not entirely suited for the South Africa market (yet) as the main purpose of this controller is for online gaming. The Logitech Netplay Controller looks like the Logitech Cordless Controller which has been split in two and a keyboard stuck in between. On either side of the keyboard you will find an analogue stick with the action buttons situated on the right hand side and the D-Pad on the left hand side. This keyboard also features a dual-vibration feedback controller so as with a regular controller you will feel the in game action. An interesting feature of the Netplay Controller is that the USB keyboard is detachable which will allow you to use it as a regular keyboard, honestly I think that using it as is a lot more comfortable. Even though I did not have any means to make full use of this keyboard it feels very comfortable and the buttons are well situated. Sadly using the PS2 online in South Africa is not yet a reality, which makes this product a but difficult to justify in terms of value, sure it has its uses but we cannot make use of the features it was designed for.



DVD Remote Control

One of the things that make the PS2 such a great console is the fact that it can also be used as a DVD player, in all fairness it probably is not a superb DVD player but it is functional nonetheless. Unfortunately controlling the DVD player with a PS2 controller is not ideal and having to get up from your couch to pause, fast forward, or skip a chapter becomes a hassle. Lucky for us lazy couch potatoes, Sony produced an infrared DVD remote control to use with the PS2. This remote control works by connecting the infrared dongle to the controller port on the PS2 and the remote itself features all of the functions that a standard DVD player remote control does. Looking at added value, this is one of the best accessories you can buy for your PS2, if you use your console to watch DVD's of course. Admit it though, exploiting the DVD player function of a PS2 is one of the ways you convinced your girlfriend that buying a PS2 instead of a stand alone DVD player is a much better idea. Now you can really show her that a PS2 can offer the same functionality as a normal DVD player.



X Tecnologies Remote Controller

Not sporting as many buttons as the original Sony DVD remote controller, the offering from X Tecnologies is well priced and offers some cool features. First off let me say that this is a relatively small remote, it has a groove underneath it for your index finger which makes it extremely comfortable to hold. The X Tecnologies Remote Controller features a D-Pad, the four action buttons and the left and right trigger buttons. This means that you can actually use this controller to play games if you wish, as you can with Sony's offering, although this one seems to be a lot easier to use for this purpose. The 12 buttons on this remote control are programmable to your liking and doing so is a lot easier than setting your VCR's timer. There is very little to find fault with this controller for me it all comes down to price.



Eye Toy

In essence the Eye Toy is a USB camera which plugs into your PS2 and together with the bundled games (or one of the new titles available for it) you become the main character. Take note though that the games you play with the Eye Toy is not the traditional PS2 type adventure game and your movement controls the action on the screen. The Eye Toy is quite fun to use and things can get a bit physical, but it is parents who will find this product a lot more valuable to keep the young ones busy. In order to use the Eye Toy effectively you need to have a plain coloured back ground, preferably white, where you will stand out and you need quite a bit of space to prance around in. If you want to spice up a party the Eye Toy would be the perfect solution and you and your friends can laugh at each other while doing silly moves in front of the television. Price wise, the Eye Toy is one of the best value for money products for the PS2, both young and old can enjoy the addictive properties of this product and I can guarantee you will not be disappointed.



--- march 2004 NAG magazine

Multitap

The Multitap is a nifty little device which allows you to connect more than 2 people to one game, on one PS2. Looking a lot like a mini PS2 console it basically allows for more controllers to be connected to the PS2 console. On one Multitap you can connect four controllers and a fifth one if you use the other controller port on the PS2 and with two of these devices you can have 8 people playing together. Looking at the multiplayer titles that are currently available this is a must have gadget if you like titles such as WWE Smackdown and Roadkill. Looking at value for money this is a great product if you can get enough friends together.

Features 80 Value for Money 80 Desirability 85 Pros: Cons: Supplied By: ERP: Internet: Value for Money 80 Desirability 85 Value for Money 80 Desirability 85 Works great | Easy to use You need friends to enjoy it Ster Kinekor [011] 445-7995 R449 www.playstation.co.za

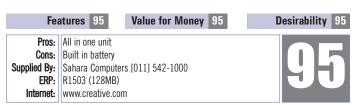
Saitek Freewave Wireless Adapter

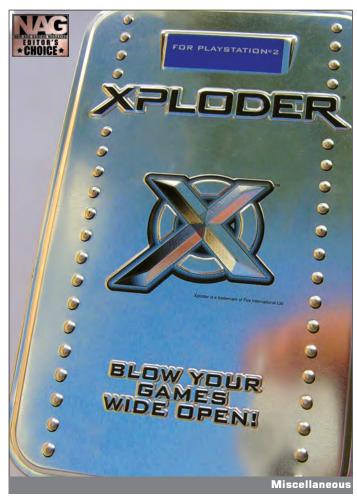
This device turns any controller into a cordless controller, which means that you can use your favourite controller at a distance of up to 10 feet from your PS2 console. The transceiver plugs into both of the controller ports on your PS2 and has a small antenna which transmits the RF signal. On the front of this transceiver is a controller port if you want to connect something like the DVD remote. The other transceiver will be placed somewhere conveniently closer to you and you can connect two controllers to this unit. The Saitek Freewave Wireless Adapter uses four AA rechargeable batteries which are housed in a battery pack and are charged from the transceiver module which is plugged into the console. To preserve battery life you can switch the rumble effect of the controller off on the controller-end transceiver but if you have an extra set of batteries handy this should not be necessary. Sadly, just as we went to print VMS informed me that due to component shortages this product's stock will be limited.



Multitap

This is the Blaze Xploder V4 - a cheat system and game enhancer. The Xploder is mainly known for its save games and cheats, and the Xploder V4 sports over 36 000 codes and over 1200 save games, all updateable via the Internet. This system is that it comes with a USB cable which plugs into both your PS2 and your PC and you are able to update your memory card by using the software supplied on the CD-Rom for your computer. With the software CD-Rom and the USB cable you are also given access to some amazing programs like DVD region free, Game Unlock, Memory Card Manager, and Game Accelerator. DVD Region free (available separately at R145) allows you to unlock the region codes set to your PS2. Game Unlock is a utility which helps you to unlock various secret vehicles, stages, and characters in any game. Memory card manager (available separately at R249) is my favourite application. By using this nifty tool you can virtually turn your computer into one giant memory card and compress the saves already on your memory card. This means that you will never need to buy another memory card again. Game Accelerator is quite an interesting application, because many of today's UK based PS2 games runs slightly slower than the US versions. Game Accelerator makes your PS2 games run about 20% faster, handy if you want to move things up a notch. Each application has one or two extra features which I will not go into much detail on.





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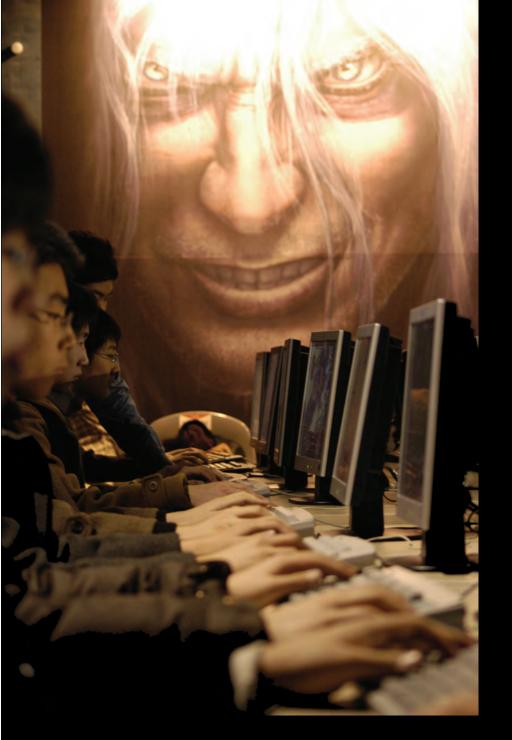
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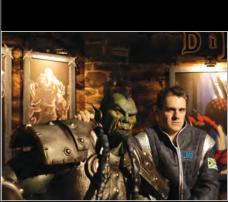
















here is a special place in the hearts of the Korean people for games produced by Blizzard Entertainment. Over the past three years, StarCraft has become the third most popular sport in the country, surpassed only by soccer and baseball. StarCraft is followed in much the same way that European soccer clubs are supported by their fans, and WarCraft III is not far behind. There are many league divisions and virtually hundreds of professional gamers, who do nothing but play all day, every day. The leagues are so established that players from other countries move to Korea to become professional gamers. Considering all this, it is hardly surprising that Blizzard chose this country as the location for its invitational tournament, aimed at promoting WarCraft III.

The best sixteen players in the world, representing almost every continent, were invited to participate. Some of the players, such as our very own Chris "sWoop" Barter, were chosen as the winners of Blizzard-sanctioned tournaments across the globe (Chris was the winner of rAge 2003), and others, such as Fredrik "Madfrog" Johannson from Sweden, were invited because of their previous achievements. The Korean representatives were chosen from the Asian online ladders, which are notorious for being the most competitive in the world. From the 15th to the 18th of January, the tournament was broadcast live on Korean television. The event was sponsored by Blizzard and overseen by leading Korean Starleague and Warleague operator Ongamenet.

We spoke to Chris about his trip to Korea, the lives of pro-gamers in Seoul, the tournament itself, and the support gaming enjoys overseas.

"I love the mindset of the Korean people," he says, "as far as technology goes, and their embracing of new-age entertainment." At the airport, he was met by two interpreters, a cameraman from Ongamenet and the tournament host. After giving a short interview, he was taken for drinks and a meal. "Our guides wouldn't let us pay for anything," he says. "I spent nothing, except on a souvenir, and a bit at the i-cafe we went to after the tourney had finished." Once the other players had arrived for the day, they were all bussed to the Olympic Park Hotel to sleep off the jet-lag. The following day was practice day, and all the participants were escorted to the COEX centre by Ongamenet staff, where they were kept under constant supervision. "We weren't allowed to do our own thing," says Chris, "it would have cost the company too much if one of us got lost." During the course of the day, they also rehearsed for the opening ceremony and received their "space suits", which are customary costumes worn by Korean pro-gamers. The opening ceremony itself was held the morning of the next day. "It was quite an experience walking to the hall where it was being held, because there was a massive line of kids queuing outside the venue, for about a hundred metres," says Chris. "While we were walking next to them they were getting so excited."

The tournament began shortly afterwards. "Before you were going to play, you had to give your mouse/keyboard to the stage manager. Then as soon as one match finished, he would run onto stage during the commercial break and set up your equipment with you in the booth," explains Chris. "By this time, the ad-break has finished and the commentators have started to introduce the game." His first opponent was the Korean number two, and a loss would eliminate him from the tournament. "It's really unnerving in the booth though," he says. "There have to be stage lights constantly on you, which are really bright. Not to mention a camera is on each player's face the entire time, as well as several roaming cameras. It's hard to stay composed and just focus on the game." Unfortunately, Chris lost the game and was knocked out. "I played the Australian in practice games and beat him easily. I also beat the Japanese guy. I could have easily beaten half of the players there, but the other half could have easily beaten me," he speculates. "They had to have the first round single elimination to get rid of the non-competitive players, with it being a live-broadcast event." The eventual winner was SK.Madfrog, followed by alt)Duckie in second place.

One of the most interesting sideshows at the WWI was the match between Korea's most famous StarCraft player, Yo-Hwan "Slayers_Boxer" Lim and a blind challenger. "It was amazing," says Chris. "Boxer was blindfolded for the first three minutes of the game to give the blind player a chance, and also to show you how hard it is to play blind. Boxer couldn't even select his units for the first few minutes, while the blind player had a full economy going. He uses sound entirely, and a lot of trial and error. But after the three minutes, Boxer took his blindfold off. His game against other progamers is insane, so the blind guy didn't have much chance in the end. It was still amazing to see."

Chris also had time to chat with the two Swedish players who are currently living in Seoul as immigrant pro-gamers. "They wake up every day and go to YECA-Station, which is a pro-team's i-cafe," he says. "They play for ten hours, then go to sleep. Everything they want gets paid for, and they have a salary as well. It wouldn't really be enough to live off, but they don't have any living expenses. HeMaN said he was a bit fed-up, and was probably going to leave soon. Madfrog was keen on staying though, and was going to ask for a raise after he won WWI."

The broadcast of Chris' game has been made available from the tournament website, www.blizzardinvitational.com. "I've been downloading StarCraft and WarCraft III videos for so long, and each time it's the same commentators, and the players are always wearing space suits," says Chris. "And now I'm in a vid, with those commentators, in a space suit. It's just insane."

community.za:

2004 Local Counter-Strike Season Kicks Off

It has been some three months since the last official competitive gaming event, and the country's top players have positively been itching to get back onto the digital field. The opening fixture of the 2004 season is, as it has been for three consecutive years now, the Mayhem Offline Counter-Strike 1.6 league. For more information and a list of dates for Mayhem-hosted events, visit www.mayhem.co.za.

This year, twenty-one teams from all across Gauteng will compete in a four month long round-robin format, fighting for places in the double-elimination stage of the league. Only teams in the A pool and the top of the B pool will advance to this final stage. Teams in the A pool receive 6 points for a win, 3 for a draw, and none for a loss, while the B pool's participants receive 4 points for a win, 2 for a draw, and of course none for a loss. A flawless victory (twelve rounds to zero) results in one bonus point for the winning team. At the end of each month, the bottom teams in the A pool move down, and the top of the B pool move up. Eventually, this system will sort the teams properly according to skill, and will be used to determine seedings for the double-elimination stage. Initial placement in either A or B pool is based on previous match history. The first league fixture for the year took place at the Casa Dos Poveiros centre in Boksburg - Mayhem's permanent venue - on the 31st of January. Three pre-registered teams had dropped out of the league, which gave a few of the B pool teams walkover victories against the no-shows, even before matches began.

The A pool, containing the three favourites: Evolve-Aim, Evolve-Ignite and Synergy, was expected to provide more than its fair share of excitement, and the teams in question did not disappoint. In the very first match, the top two seeds faced off on the popular map, "de_dust2". With Ignite looking to take an early lead in the terrorist pistol round, Dr4k from Aim succeeded in killing all four remaining Ignite members to steal the round and force Ignite onto the defensive. Aim eventually won the game convincingly, 17-7. In the following match, Aim played the unpredictable third seed - Synergy - on "de_cbble". What was expected to be a fairly easy win for Aim turned into a desperate struggle, Synergy taking the first half 7-5 with some excellent strategy calls and solid accuracy. Synergy started equally strong in the second half, walking all over Aim to take the score to 5-1, needing only one more round win for victory. However, it was not to be. Even having no money to buy decent weapons, Aim showed their extensive experience and talent, winning that crucial "save round", and then taking the next five to draw the game 12-12.

In the third round, Ignite now needed a win against Synergy to assure them a first or second-place ranking. Playing the lesser known map: "de_clan1_mill", which neither team had practiced properly, it was impossible to predict the outcome. Again Synergy started strong, taking a 7-5 lead at the end of the first half. Ignite knew they needed at least 8 wins as terrorist, which would not be easy to get. Each round was edge-of-the-seat entertainment, with usually only one or two players left alive every time. Ignite, calling strategy on the fly and changing their tactics constantly, kept Synergy tied up long enough to win the half 9-3 and the match 14-10. A round win was deducted from Ignite's score and added to Synergy's after the match for a minor accidental offense, leaving the score at 13-11.

The smaller matches were no less intriguing, with TUS and BHB battling it out for fourth place. TUS showed their mettle in the final game of the day, only losing by one round to Synergy (who eventually finished third). Ignite took second place behind their Aim clanmates. Illuzion had little trouble with the other teams in the B pool and proved that they belong in the upper division. NAG's Player of the Day award goes to Warren "Dr4k" Medcalf of Evolve Aim for his vital contributions in the games against Ignite and Synergy. These would probably have been very different without him.

POOL A					
Ranking	Team Name	Wins	Draws	Losses	Points
1.	Shuttle * Evolve Aim	10	1	-	73
2.	Shuttle * Evolve Ignite	10	-	1	68
3.	Synergy	9	1	1	62
4.	The Usual Suspects	6	-	5	42
5.	Bad Habit Boyz	6	-	5	38
6.	Chickenhead	5	1	5	38
7.	501	4	-	7	32
8.	Voltz	4	1	6	26
9.	The Elders	4	-	7	26
10. *	Division Six	3	-	8	21
11. *	K4	1	-	10	8
* These teams drop to the B pool next month					

POOL B					
Ranking	Team Name	Wins	Draws	Losses	Points
1. **	Illuzion	11	-	-	53
2.	Two Elements	10	-	1	48
3.	Kusuf Al Narr	9	-	2	42
4.	Hell'z Own	8	-	3	36
5.	Mist	7	-	4	34
6.	Gamers With Attitude A	5	-	6	25
7.	Men At Work	5	-	6	24
8.	Chaotic	4	-	7	20
9.	Raven	3	-	8	18
10.	Gamers With Attitude B	3	-	8	16
** This team moves up to the A pool next month					

The Cyber X-cruciating Games

he first major international gaming event in 2004 was the Cyber X Games, held in Las Vegas in the United States of America. But what had been previously billed as possibly the greatest LAN event on Earth, turned into a complete disaster that topped even the horrendous "1000manLAN" us South Africans had to endure last year in May. Six hundred thousand US Dollars was advertised as total prize money for the competition, which was to support six of the most popular games. Players from all over the world, including top European clans such as Schroet Kommando, Four Kings and Xtreme, flew themselves to Las Vegas to compete for their share of the money. This was most unfortunate, considering the state the event found itself in. It was apparent that virtually no planning went into the Cyber X Games. There were far too few competition machines, most of which had LCD monitors (not conducive at all to professional gaming); the network was down for half the weekend and their servers for most of the games were not setup beforehand. This resulted in the eventual cancellation of three of the tournament games before they even got started. The cancellations included the main event, the Counter-Strike competition, which had been allocated almost half of the prize money.

The UT2003 and WarCraft III events managed to finish and were won by Lauke (from clan Xtreme) and Grubby (from Four Kings) respectively. The Quake 3 tournament was abandoned with only the loser's bracket final and super final matches still to be played, as the power was cut off, and the players forced to leave the venue. Cooller (the Russian prodigy who has won virtually every event he has participated in), Zero4 (America's number one) and Elpajuo (a former Challenge Pro Mode Arena champion from Venezuela) agreed to share the winnings.

To date, nothing has been heard of any of the supposed prize money.

community update

player of the month

Name: Nick:

Gandalf

Age:

Quote:

Occupation: Clan:

Games:

Achievements:

Daniel van Flymen

18 Student

Synergy

Counter-Strike

- Represented South Africa at the World Cyber Games 2002
- 1st place at Worfaire Finals 2002 (Team: DC-Octane)
- 1st place at Worfaire Prelims 2002 (Team: DC-Octane)
- П 1st place in GLSA Online League 2002 (Team: DC-Octane)
- 2nd place at GamersGate Carousel 2002 (Team: DC-Octane)
- 2nd place at GamersGate Eastgate 2002 (Team: DC-Octane)
- 3rd place at rAge 2003 (Team: Synergy)

"Really really ridiculously good looking."



<The Basilisk> Your new team, Synergy, is technically the underdog this year, how does that feel as opposed to the 2002 season where you were the clear favourite from the beginning?

<Gandalf> Well, Synergy is unlike any team I've ever been a part of. We seem to gel together - we have an awesome leader (Slipstream) and very skillful players. Our dedication to the game since inception has not been questioned. We are trying to

win by strategy and not skill alone (like DC-Octane did in 2002). It's a very rewarding experience to see your team start off from scratch.

<The Basilisk> How much does international experience count for amongst the local community?

< Gandalf > Four of our five members have international experience. including myself. The game has changed so rapidly with the release of Counter-Strike 1.6 that you need the experience to work as a team, you can't hack it with lone-rangers. International experience teaches you how to try beat a "better" team through good strategy.

<The Basilisk> What are your opinions on the changes made in version

<Gandalf> The new changes made to CS 1.6 with regard to round timing, money and especially weapons are there to level the playing field between the terrorist and counter-terrorist forces. I think that the changes were needed, they make clan play so much more exciting to watch - there is more action and less delay. You can't save out rounds or time out the bomb anymore, which is a very good addition. Our playing style will adapt to the changes as quickly as possible.

<The Basilisk> Do you think the local community has slackened or improved over the past two years?

< Gandalf > Both. I think it's great that we have initiatives like Gamers Gate who are there to liven up the community with local and international events. Mayhem clan has now come officially into being again which should make for some healthy competition between teams. The downside is having a community which is based around two main online game-hosts, namely M-Web and SGS (SAIX Gaming Service). I think we need to have more initiative from companies sponsoring game servers to allow our community to grow and provide for healthy competition. I do not believe that servers should have rules or guidelines, except for anti-cheating, and they should definitely not be run under a dictatorship (so to speak) like SGS.

TOP COUNTER-STRIKERS RETIRE

Two of the most recognisable names in the local community will no longer be found roaming our servers. This is the word on the street as Shaun "Deathsbane" Marx and Warren "Storm" Steven announced their retirement from the local pro gaming scene this month. Storm made the decision for personal and professional reasons, and Deathsbane is departing from South Africa on the 8th of February to study in Australia. Storm was one of South Africa's World Cyber Games representatives last year and formerly part of the old Gamers League of South Africa. He remains a manager of Evolve.

Community.za caught up with Deathsbane at the Mayhem Offline League to chat about his departure. "I went on holiday there, liked the country very much, and decided to enroll," he says. "I reckon it was quite an impulsive decision." Of course, many here will be wondering more about his gaming future. "I'd rather concentrate on my studies for a while, but gaming will always be a part of my life," says Shaun. "I'll see how things go in Australia. Maybe I can get into one of the top clans there." He leaves behind a community in which his skill was legendary, and a team who have played with him for the better part of the last three years. "Nobody is irreplaceable, so I think they will still do very well," he says. "I'm just very sad to leave my team at such short notice. I've become very good friends with all of them, basically they've become my brothers. I'll miss them in Australia. It will never be the same playing for another team."

LOCAL WARCRAFT III TOP 16 ONLINE TOURNAMENT

Vetoll has once again come forward to organize an online tournament for the WarCraft III community to keep competition alive in Real Time Strategy. The best 16 available local players were invited, and since all but two of Clan Nightfall's players were unable to participate, the other clans were given an opportunity to challenge for first place. Clan gX rose to the occasion, with two of their players making the top four. Trend (from clan MoD) caused two upsets, knocking out both Sec.8.m00p and Vetoll (both high finishers in previous tournaments). nf-Juvenile, who was expected to come either first or second, was forced to forfeit his loser's bracket final game due to time constraints, giving gX-Cloud a chance in the final. But the tournament was eventually won by none other than nfsWoop, South Africa's current Frozen Throne champion.

Final Standings:

- 1) nf-sWoop
- 2) -gX-Cloud-
- 3) nf-Juvenile
- -gX-Dean
- MoD-Trend / BB-Insano

book reviewS

Epic poems and tales

reviewer(s): Iwan Pienaar | Walt Pretoriu

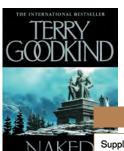


monsters and the critics and other essays

Supplied By: kalahari.net **Website:** www.kalahari.net **RRP:** R 91.95

Many people consider John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's contribution to English literature to begin with The Hobbit and end with The Lord of the Rings. Certainly, these works deserve their high place in Tolkien's bibliography, but the Oxford professor was also a man of many other talents. For one, he was one of the editors of the first Oxford English Dictionary. It also goes without saying that Tolkien was one of the foremost experts of ancient languages in his time. He practically developed several complete languages before he turned sixteen. Tolkien also became an expert on Old English, something that will make Shakespeare seem like a light read.

As any student of English will be able to tell you, one of the best known poems (or, strictly speaking, eulogy) in Old English is that of the warrior Beowulf. This eulogy is also one of the more difficult ones to analyse and read due to the unique nature of its diction. This makes Beowulf a favourite amongst English professors to use to introduce their Honours students to the wonders of Old English (should any one be interested in learning more about this language, feel free to e-mail me at da3dalus@3duniverse.co.za). In Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays, Christopher Tolkien has compiled several essays his dad wrote on a range of subjects including that of Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and fairy tales. While it will not appeal to many readers as it is an academic work, interesting to read if you want to increase your knowledge of Tolkien. If you like your fantasy stories slightly more difficult that the standard fare, then I suggest you get a copy of Beowulf (the Seamus Heaney translation is the best available) and use the Tolkien essays as a companion. It is well worth it.



naked empire

Supplied By: amazon.com Website: www.amazon.com RRP: \$ 18.00 [excl. shipping]

Naked Empire is book eight of The Sword of Truth fantasy epic started by Terry Goodkind in 1994. Thankfully, newcomers to the series will have nothing to fear as Goodkind wrote this book as a stand-alone novel. While it continues the theme of the previous seven novels, it provides readers with more than enough information to fill in any blanks that they may have. Of course, the risk is always there that loyal readers of the series will get annoyed by the "extra" information in this adventure. In Naked Empire, the wizard-hero Richard Cypher is back with his beloved Kahlan Amnell, the last Mother Confessor. However, Richard has been poisoned and he must find a way to cure himself and save an empire. To make matters worse, he is offered not only his life, but the salvation of a people, in exchange for delivering Kahlan into bondage to the enemy.

Even though this is a stand-alone novel, Naked Empire is not an easy book to get into. By its very nature it tends to be a drawn-out affair at times. However, when the action starts, it comes thick and fast and is driven by a strong narrative. Where this novel should succeed is to introduce a new range of readers to The Sword of Truth series and even get them to read the series from the start. Of course, seeing that the average length of one book in the series is 600 pages, it might take a while to catch up.



The Long Road Nickelback

If you were a fan of Silver Side up, you will certainly enjoy this new work by Canadian Chad and

the boys. However, if you're looking for any kind of progression for the band, you're not going to find it here. In fact, this album seems to be a pure continuation of the previous one - the same kind of riffs and rhythms abound. It also seems that Kroeger needs to get over his girlfriend related hang ups...



Freddy Vs Jason Various Artists

Overall this soundtrack is a brilliant collection of mostly nu-metal, featuring bands like

III Nino, Spineshank and Hatebreed. You'll also find tracks by Slipknot, Sevendust, In Flames, Lamb of God and Type O Negative here, as well as one by ex-pats Seether (previously Saran Gas, if you didn't know). There are a lot of previously unreleased tracks - in fact, ten of the twenty tracks have never been released before. A good collection for those who like it heavy.



Legends of Hip Hop Various Artists

This CD contains 19 collaborations between some of the biggest names in modern hip hop -

artists such as Eminem, Ice T, Kurupt, Flavor Flav and Run of Run DMC, in various combinations. Hip Hop tends to be a very "collaborative" genre, in which artists tend to mix and match their abilities constantly. This CD contains some of the best songs created in that way ever released. A word of warning, though. It's seriously adults only and it's not really for the casual hip hop listener. Some of this stuff is pretty hard core.



Smoke Out (DVD) Various Artists

Featuring
Kottonmouth Kings,
Circle Jerks, Bone
Thugs and Harmony,
Everlast, Cypress
Hill and Snoop Dogg,
this DVD is a treat

for anyone who loves their hip hop loud, lewd and live.

Recorded at the all day Smoke Out festival, it also features 2 behind the scenes featurettes and a photo gallery, and is presented in 5.1 surround sound. It's a great buy for fans, with some excellent performances.

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alt.gaming:



The Ring RRP: R130.95

This is the graphic novel which inspired the film of the same name. This version comes in the original Japanese format, and involves reading it from back to front. It is interesting to note as you read the story that you can see where the films director got a lot of his cinematographic ideas from. Drawn in the manga style, this version is in many ways more horrific than the film. While not necessarily gorier, some of the images are more disturbing to the psyche. This first novel is reflected in the movie, but it is only the first of a series... so there will be a lot more horror in store.



Kindergoth

RRP: R29.95

Meet Alise on her first day of kindergarten - a big change for any kid. But Alise is also part of a group of the world's youngest Goths; complete with the bad attitude, swearing, and the general cheeriness that is the Goth world. Aside from normal adjustment issues, Alise and her friends are also the subjects of Alien study and get bothered by the government agents who are tracking the Aliens - all of which makes life complicated when you are not allowed to cross the road by your self. Get the comic, get the attitude, and then laugh yourself silly.



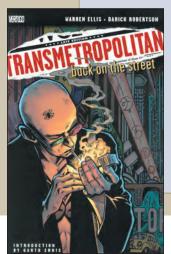




GI Joe

RRP: R27.95

For those who aren't old enough to have read the original Joes back in the 80's, this is the story of two organizations - the Joe's and their evil counterparts "Cobra". Quasi-superheroes in the real world, each of the characters has a descriptive codename and unique weapons or military skills. It's not as cardboard as you might expect though, since there is a great deal of depth and background to the personalities. It's a world where people die, good and bad, with plenty of action and stylish art.



Transmetropolitan: Back on the Streets

RRP: R63.95

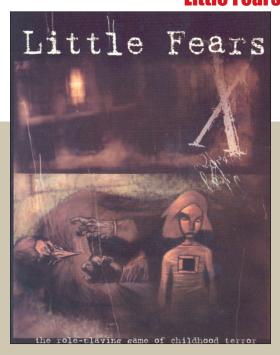
Spider Jerusalem is a reporter in a city filled with every sin you can imagine. He's cranky, miserable, and determined to stop the president from getting re-elected. It's a hard hitting look at politics, the best and worst of humanity, and the way we allow ourselves to be led by their noses. This is black humour at its best.

This graphic novel is the story of a complete bastard trying to make the world right, whether it wants it or not. If you like the Gonzo Journalism of Hunter S. Thomson, you will love life in the City, with Spider and his filthy assistants as your guides.





RPG Review: Little Fears



RRP: 183.95

There are three main genre mainstays within role playing: fantasy, science fiction and horror. This latter genre is becoming increasingly popular with players, as it preys on more primal elements of the psyche. However, within the three genres, originality is becoming pretty difficult. After all, there's only so much one can do when you're in a box.

Every now and then, though, a new game is released that, while not leaving the confines of it's given genre, is original in many aspects. Little Fears is such a game and, because of its very nature, it should prove very scary indeed.

The premise behind the game is that players take the part of children between the ages of six and twelve. This in itself makes the game difficult, and the GM is responsible for enforcing child like behaviour effectively amongst the players.

Little Fears deals with the things we were afraid of when we were small. Things that live in the closet, under the bed and in the shadows. Things that we forget about when we grow up, memories that get buried under a mountain of bills, worries and responsibilities.

With simplistic rules and systems designed to let play flow rather than get bogged down in dice rolls and rule arguments. Even the character sheet is child like, to help enforce the idea that the players are controlling children.

Items of power include teddy bears, trinkets and other things that kids might value. And the monsters? They need to be dealt with in the ways that children would - with lots of imagination. Little Fears is a masterfully created game that allows a freedom of playing while still being intensive in certain areas. This is a great game for experienced, adventurous groups willing to try something new.

on the web totwo

Trailing cosmic chicks



www.nintendojo.com

There has always only been one source anywhere that gives you the Nintendo news you want! Sadly, we don't know where that is. That said, Nintendojo is right next on the list. One of the oldest Nintendo fan sites, it's not updated as often as we'd like (at the time of writing this they still had to look into the whole DS thing). But it's a great source for new game news, screenshots, help and other things that will get your little fan boy heart pattering a bit faster. If you're a Nintendo platform owner this should at least be in your bookmarks list..



www.trailersworld.com

Anyone can get trailers these days. Hit any major download server and you'll find them. Or if you are really impatient, keep a hawk's eye on the likes of ComingSoon.net or the Apple Quicktime trailer site. But the older stuff can be a bit harder to get hold of, so the ideal site would be one that has all the old and new stuff...

Trailersworld hosts a huge amount of these preview reels, including for the likes of Rambo, Nightmare on Elm Street and Indiana Jones - a plethora of silver screen takes that will get you on a nostalgic binge. Either that or you'll sit and be amazed at how bad old trailers really were. Not that it matters - it's still fun to browse what they have.

Okay, no trailer for Brazil, but we found one of the Babylon 5 ones. Yup, it's really bad...



www.pimpedoutcases.net

Check out the case, man! It's hot! It kicks! It's pimping! Okay, we doubt that there are actual case pimps out there, dragging their newly modded PCs and showing them off on cheap street corners. But case modding is a big deal to a lot of people, so why not go somewhere where people are fanatical about the hobby?

At Pimped Out Cases they serve users with the latest in modding news - but you can get that anywhere. Instead, it's also got a large picture gallery from users and their case mods - a lot accompanied with site links on the process they used.



www.strangecosmos.com

Not everything on the web is in the name of good taste. And we should be very thankful for that! After all, where else will you find such classic headlines as "Whale Explodes on Thailand Highway"?

Strange Cosmos holds the self-appointed name of biggest humour and funny picture archive on the web'. While that's not been proved, it is huge and that's enough to not make us ask for some sort of official paper backing their claims. Some of the stuff is weird, some just eerie, and some, such as the weather phenomena, are simply mind-blowing.



www.dangerboy.co.za

Not every site we find. Some come neatly mentioned in press releases. Danger Boy's online home space is one of those. At first we approached it with lots of animosity and a general lack of interest. But once you get surfing it turns out to be a pretty cool site.

For those at a loss, Danger Boy is a fellow that does stupid stuff on 5FM. Apparently he makes music too, but we couldn't find any of it. And because Puma sponsors his clothes, he only looks at Puma clothes. Then again, if you are trying to get fashion help from a website, you might have bigger problems than this.

Of course, you could go look at the women in the DangerDog section or look at the cool movies section. Hey, any man who worships wrestling and Ouentin Tarantino is okay by us.



www.top500.org

So where is the world's most powerful computer? With the upcoming era of Supercomputers (after all, IBM recently revealed their Teraflop-in-a-box machine) it might bode you well to know what's what in the world of high-power computing. Look, it's a no-lose situation. You sound smart enough to know about it, but you're not geek enough to know how it actually works. See? Top 500 is a site that lists the 500 most powerful computers in the world. And your neighbour's over clocked dual CPU machine isn't anywhere close to it. Stronger than 20 bottles of prune juice!



The world's best Trading Card Game will pitch your wits against your opponents'. You'll need all the help you can get: strong creatures, nerves of steel and some serious muscle - like the one between your ears. To start playing Magic: The Gathering, nothing beats the Core Game Starter Set. It has everything two people need to play their first game. The step-by-step demo CD-Rom makes playing the first game easy.



Distributed in South Africa by Games Emporium www.geon.co.za magic@icon.co.za





comedy all round

by Anton Lines

Anime Legends - Rumiko Takahashi



Think anime comedy and the popular series Ranma ½ comes immediately to mind. Think Ranma, and you think Rumiko Takahashi, the woman responsible for the creation of several of Japan's most loved comedy animes. Born in 1957 in Niigata, she decided early in her life that she wanted to follow the path of an artist. Like most anime creators, she began her career in manga. Her debut comic, "Overbearing People" (Katte Na Yatsura), was published in Japan's "Shonen Sunday" magazine during her final year in high school. After graduating, Rumiko went on to study at

the Gekiga Sonjuku school of manga. In 1978, Shonen Sunday published "Urusei Yatsura" which launched her career. It ran as a comic series for nine years and was made into a television series and six feature films.

"Maison Ikkoku" followed in 1982 and ran concurrently with Urusei Yatsura until the close of both series in 1987. She then began work on "Ranma ½", first as a manga, then a television / movie series which she wrote, designed and initially directed. However, she left the show after its third season, when she created "Mermaid Forest".

She continued to draw the Ranma manga until 1996. Without taking a break, she moved immediately on to Inuyasha, which also became a television series in 2000. She continues to work for Shonen Sunday where her creations are exclusively featured. Over the years, she has also produced several illustrated short stories

In 1987, she was awarded the Shogakukan Award for Best New Comic Artist in Japan, and the Inkpot Award in America in 1994. She is currently Japan's fifth richest woman.

MoviE RevieW

Hand Maid May



To begin this review, I think it would be appropriate to re-address the anime sub-style known as ecchi or "lewd anime". It should never be confused with hentai (which is essentially porn) and most of the time is actually quite tasteful. While there is seldom any actual sex or nudity in this style, it is largely dependant on sexual innuendos and situations, primarily for the purpose of humour. These days, western sitcoms and movies have been following much the same route, as sex, being the taboo topic it once was, is not yet as exhausted as many other themes. Hand Maid May is a textbook example of ecchi, featuring countless panty shots and a nerd-type main character who gets himself unwittingly into various awkward situations.

Kazuya Saotome is a Computer Science student at the prestigious Osza no Mizu Industries University in Japan. His life's work (which is causing him to come dangerously close to failing his degree) involves the creation of a squid-like artificially intelligent robot. He is on the verge of getting it to work properly, but something is still missing from the project. Meanwhile, his childhood acquaintance and devious rival, Nanbara-sama, is growing increasingly jealous of Kazuya's success and the popularity of his inventions. One fateful day, Nanbara hatches a plan to put Kazuya out of contention for good, giving him a CD ROM containing a malicious virus, which he has disguised as a helpful piece of software. But when it takes effect, Kazuya stumbles on a secret website while trying to purge the virus from his system, and accidentally orders cyberdoll May, a hand-sized robot servant girl. May is delivered to his apartment the following day.

The plot is rather far-fetched, but it keeps with the absurd tone of the entire series. It isn't anything profound, just a light-hearted piece of entertainment that doesn't require much deep thought. This is a series of stark ups and downs. In some places it's rather bland, and some of the characters can become predictable. However, there are also moments of brilliance which pop up every so often - enough to keep one interested enough to watch all eleven episodes. Nanbara-sama and his sword of truth (metaphorically speaking, of course) are the highlights of the show, making it memorable for the scenes in which they appear. Kazuya's next-door neighbour is, naturally, a beautiful girl who is definitely interested in him and makes constant advances, which he does not notice. Not to mention the comedic

possibilities of having robot girls running around the house.

The animation is often quite sloppy and it is plain to see the animators cheated a lot with their motion so as to escape the need for real work. The soundtrack is too cutesy for my liking and doesn't stand out amongst the hundreds of good anime soundtracks available. Translation is average (complete with the usual

spelling and grammar errors in the subtitles), and this means it is poor by western standards. Hand Maid May does not have much appeal outside of its genre, but fans of this type of anime will still enjoy it for its moments.







Total Score (out of 100)	68
Translation	6
Animation	6
Characters	7
Soundtrack	6
Story	7
Concept	Ь

Genre:	Ecchi Comedy
Year:	2000
Producer:	Pioneer
Format:	Series
Episodes:	11
Language:	Japanese with English subtitles
Age Rest:	PG 13
Availability:	Uncommon









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- HyperTransport™ technology
- DDR400, 8X AGP
- Serial ATA with RAID (Silicon Image 3112)
- FireWire® 400, USB 2.0, 6-channel audio





With the introduction of not only new units and abilities, but also of a number of new sub-factions, Zero Hour expands the scope of its base game and adds strategic depth. We take a look at some sound principles for playing EA's expansion to its excellent strategy game Generals.

General notes

Zero Hour has placed quite a heavy emphasis on stealth. Therefore, it becomes very important to keep an eye out for hidden units. The game offers players the means to do this, and players should not overlook this. Sure, many players will not bother very much with stealth units, but strong players will generally seek decisive advantages by these means, and being unprepared is simply begging to be devastated. Zero Hour also introduces a number of support units that, although not having firepower, or possessing it in small amounts, are still essential. Due to space constraints, I'll briefly touch upon each faction and its new units, as well as discussing the role of each new sub-faction.

The USA side gets the sentry drone as its new detector

unit. These should be sent to key areas where they can keep an eye on enemy movements. Be careful to place these in places where they can observe, but are not directly in the path of troop movements, as although sentry drones are stealthy. they can be spotted with other detectors. You will most likely find that the sentry drone gun upgrade is a disadvantage more often than not, as instead of remaining hidden, they get rather trigger happy. There are very few units that sentry drones can take on 1-on-1, so it's best just to leave them to watch. The avenger is obviously very useful



USA Air Force General

A good way to play this faction, ironically, involves the construction of a war factory before an airfield. The war factory allows supply depots to build combat Chinooks, which are like flying humvees. The combat Chinook's

disadvantage is that it seldom ever shoots anything itself, so getting it to earn experience is difficult. and being airborne, it gets no drones, so it can't auto-repair. This means that these need to be looked after with care, and repaired whenever damaged. Also, be prepared to evacuate it if things get dicey. After outfitting the first combat Chinook (a good mix is



two rangers, five missile defenders, then a pathfinder once they become available), get a couple of king raptors up, followed by a couple of Comanches that can accompany the combat Chinook/s. Try have two or three combat Chinooks - these are great for putting out fires in bases, or for hunting down isolated targets. They possess point-defence lasers, so are somewhat resistant to rocket fire, especially in numbers.

USA Super-weapon General

The idea with this one is to become invulnerable, grown your economy, then quickly develop two or three particle cannons. This faction's modified patriot missiles are ideally suited to this task; however, they often require micromanagement. Be sure, when attacked by vehicles, to have the EMP patriots alternate their targets. This way, you'll keep several units disabled, putting you in a position to kill them all while taking minimal damage. In the early game, it's highly advisable to kit out around three humvees with missile defenders (leaving one seat open for a pathfinder each later on). This force can easily challenge isolated tanks (one or two at a time), and is quick enough to respond to emergencies or to hunt down stragglers. Make sure to have TOW missile researched, to maximise these units' effectiveness. Later on, build an airfield and get some raptors patrolling potential problem areas. The search and destroy battle plan is quite appropriate, as it even further extends the already impressive range of the EMP patriots, although any of the plans can be validly adopted.

USA Laser General

This faction offers close to a standard USA side, trading in siege weapons for harder-hitting tank and defensive armament. In multiplayer, this faction is useful for the dual functions of main assault (the laser crusaders hit hard!) and anti-air support (avengers are cheaper for this faction). Also, in team games, a laser player should consider placing the odd laser turret at allies' bases, as these don't suffer the disadvantages of missile-based systems (can be foxed by USA's aerial countermeasures, tend to run out of fuel against some fast retreating aircraft.)





against aircraft, but it also serves two other functions: it laser-paints targets to improve allies' firepower, and it possesses a point-defence laser that will knock out inbound missiles. Combining avengers with paladin tanks is very effective, and renders the army very resistant to missile attacks.

Finally, the microwave tank is not a very effective fighting unit, being able only to fry infantry that get way too close, but it disables buildings at a decent range use this to disable defensive towers and allow your other forces to clean them up. You won't need many of these - two or three should be plenty most of the time. In terms of upgrades, the hellfire drone is quite interesting. It lacks the ability to repair its parent vehicle, so in that regard the battle drone scores over it. However, once the parent vehicle has gained two or more stripes of experience, it auto-repairs, making the hellfire drone a viable option. Chemical suits should be researched whenever playing against China or GLA, particularly the latter. As this is researched in the

strategy center, you will know by that stage who you are facing.

China is the only side that benefits from a singular new building - the Internet center. Although a crucial structure, be careful not to rely on it for all your resource hacking needs, as it is a prime target. Always keep a few extra hackers making money in inconspicuous places, preferably off the main routes that forces travel. This will prevent you from losing your Internet center while out of money and unable to replace it. The scouting upgrades in the Internet center are essential, especially the first one, and should be carried out ASAP - the more you

know about your enemy, the better. China now gets the listening outpost, which is a garrisoned detector unit that is itself hidden while



China Infantry General

Ironically, best results are achieved with this faction by the building of two war factories as early as possible, rather than additional barracks. This way, you can churn out the two improved troop carries, one filled with

minigunners, the other packed with tank hunters. Then send a few of each into an enemy base and empty them. Why empty them? Several reasons firstly, out of the vehicles the Chinese infantry gain their hording bonus; secondly, there is quite a psychological aspect to a sea of troopers



unloading in your base! Minigunners carry a small version of a gattling gun, so research the gattling upgrade as early as possible. It's a good idea to balance your force somewhat with air support and siege weaponry as well, as infantry alone can be disposed of by a crafty player. Black Lotus also gets bonuses in this faction, so get one out as soon as possible.

China Tank General

This hard-hitting faction can be devastating if used correctly. Battlemaster veterancy as your first general point spent is pretty much a must, as they then come out with two stripes, meaning that they constantly auto-repair as well as being stronger. In team games, a player using this faction will provide that heavy hammer that is required for other players with finickier technologies to support. The emperor tank is also worth building in moderate numbers, as it fulfils both gattling and healing functions. This faction's resource-getting abilities have been limited, so watch your economy.

China Nuclear General

This faction, although powerful, can be quite tricky to play, mainly because the tanks start out with the nuclear tank speed upgrade, meaning that they are quite painful to lose. So, research isotope stability as early as possible, otherwise whenever one of your tanks dies, you'll have a domino chain reaction taking place that is quite likely to leave you without an army. Nuke cannons are particularly worthwhile having when they don't require expenditure of a general point. Be sure to field a squad of MiGs, as being able to deliver nuclear payloads over distances is very handy indeed. Lastly, the nuclear carpet bomber is essentially a must, being on the same timer as the regular carpet bomber, but dealing out more damage.

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stationary. A couple of these should accompany any army, especially when facing a stealth GLA opponent who can make permanently hidden hijackers. The helix adds oomph to China's air power, being essentially an airborne overlord tank equivalent. It's wise to mix up the various upgrade types if you are planning on building several of these.

The ECM tank is China's new subtle unit. It cannot kill anything, but it puts enemy ground vehicles to sleep. It also generates a field that jams rockets' guidance systems, making inbound rockets veer off randomly. While this doesn't mean that every incoming rocket/missile will miss, it does mean that many do, while the rest spread their damage around, defeating attempts at focused fire to take out key units. This unit is VERY, VERY useful!

China now gets carpet bombing at three stars, and I just can't see not taking this ability. It isn't scalable, so need only be taken once, and is on a comparatively short timer - highly recommended.

GLA gets a new class of buildings - fake structures, akin to those seen in Red Alert (the first one), differing in that they can later be upgraded to the real deal. These can be very effective against players who like to deal out death from a distance with aircraft or super-weapons, as they can make it difficult for such players to discern worthwhile targets. Also, the investment is never really wasted, as any of these fake buildings can be turned into real ones.

The saboteur and combat cycle are unusual in their freedom of mobility, as slopes and cliffs present them with far less difficulty. The combat cycles are particularly effective when manned by a terrorist, though the ideal way to implement this is by playing the GLA demolitions general, who gets this configuration by default.

The battle bus is an underrated, often overlooked unit. The USA demonstrates the power of vehicles that can be manned by infantry which can fire from within by means of the extremely dangerous humvee. While the battle bus is not as quick as the hummer, it can carry more troops. Furthermore, it has two lives, although the second is without movement. This is still quite useful, as a battle bus can be sent deeply into a base during the course of an attack, where it may eventually be destroyed, becoming a bunker for a while, troubling the base's owner for a while more yet.

In terms of upgrades, high on the list of priorities are the workers' new shoes (which is quite comical, in a way, as they've been asking for them since the beginning). The shoes increase the workers' movement rate, which translates, in the most immediate sense, into higher income from supply docks. It also, of course, means that workers can walk to remote places more quickly, should that be necessary. The camo netting upgrade for defensive structures makes for a really nasty surprise, and is also very useful against air force and super-weapon players. One of the most powerful new general's abilities is the sneak attack. Simply scan an area at the back of an opponent's base with a radar van, then deploy an invasion force in his back garden! Players who build a defensive

> perimeter but neglect inner base defence will feel the sting of this one! (Conversely, there's a lesson to be learned here - always have some form of defence in the heart of your base, even if it's quite rudimentary at least it will buy you time to send reinforcements there, before critical tech-supporting structures are destroyed.)

Regrettably, there isn't space to discuss the many, many new possibilities that Zero Hour opens up (it would take something on the order of a small book to do this!) I hope that the notes here have drawn your attention to important subtleties. May you vanquish your foes!









This faction is difficult to play against AI opponents, as it relies heavily on psychology while lacking seriously heavy firepower. Against human opponents, however, it can be devastating. It is particularly useful in a team game, as while the main engagements are taking place, the stealth player can execute sneaky strikes where opponents don't expect them. When your economy permits, be sure to start camouflaging all your buildings, starting with the most likely targets for superweapons and air-strikes. This faction's hijacker is permanently cloaked, so make use of this to undermine enemy tank columns (overlord and emperor tanks are particularly juicy targets for this, of course, as are many siege weapons.) Using the GPS scrambler on a group of rocket buggies can also be a powerful stratagem, allowing them to move around unseen, then quickly strike somewhere and, if necessary, fade back into the shadows. The fact that this faction's rebels are cloaked makes for great ambushing opportunities - leave, say, eight or so rebels in some place where enemies are likely to pass, then strike at the tail of the column and pick off a couple of units; then fade away and move them to another location, and do it all over again! The rebel ambush general's ability is powerful with this side, as the rebels are hidden to begin with.

This faction is a truly nasty piece of work. Tanks begin with anthrax beta tipped shells, making them uncommonly deadly to infantry in the early game. Keep in mind that toxin rebels are useless against buildings. In other respects, this faction plays very much like basic GLA. If playing in a team, go after infantry first and foremost, as toxin rebels go through infantry like a hot knife through butter.

GLA Demolition General

This is another tricky faction to play, as it has such a specific approach and function. The fact that this faction relies predominantly on suicide troops means that each blow must be carefully calculated to count. You are advised to make use of the advanced demolition traps, particularly as many players tend to neglect early game detection. This side's combat cycles are great value for money - they are relatively cheap, very fast, mobile, and explode on impact! A sustained assault on the front of a base, then a surprise attack with combat cycles around the back is likely to yield great results.

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- 1 MySQL Database
- · Control Panel



i n b 8 x

Badger Times

[late edition]

Badger Hunt #3 Winner [February Issue]

Led: I received this mail 27 January 2004 @ 15h58 making Scion our winner. Well done for spotting an easy to find badger. At time of printing 150 other people sent in the correct location of the badger. Here's the message]:

The February badger is on page 37, in the screenshot in the middle of the page. He is in the 2nd block in the top left corner.

Scion

Ed: Well done - your prize will never arrive because you didn't include any details - you have 3 days from the time you read this to supply your details or I feed your prize to the sharks [NAG staff].

Little Badger [mistaken identity and red herrings and new rules]

Incorrect location(s)

Page 70 - right-hand screenshot on the back of the skater's shirt - [uncanny].

Page 39 - on the leg of one of the girls climbing into the Jacuzzi - [we wouldn't be this unfair].

On the **cover** - the badger tattoo on the woman - [sigh].

Some rules and modifications - Seeing that some people get the magazine [subscribers] up to a week before anyone else they have an unfair advantage so I'll be picking a random winner each month and not the first entry I get.

Also, only send in E-mail. I'm not going to transfer SMS entries onto my PC so only send in E-mail and the subject line must read: **Badger** < Month> - where month is the... come on do I really have to explain this part? I use a mail sorting system, Competitions, Caption of the Month, Badger, Spam, Personal etc. so using the wrong subject line can result in accidental deletion or misfiling and you'll never win anything... are we on the same page? Also remember to treat the badger like you would want someone to treat you, calling him a freaking badger or sneaky little bugger isn't nice.

This is what you're looking for each issue - a badger hidden inside a screenshot inside the magazine. The badger on the cover doesn't count, he wears fake fur.

And another thing, we've been given a very cool prize

to give away, thanks to *Plantronics*. This little badger appears to be a major hit with a cult following - we might even start selling badger T-shirts and lunch boxes. Anyway *Plantronics* have given us an .Audio 45 USB stereo PC headset (this is a good headset, see our review in the Jan 2004 issue) which we will give to the winner of the Spot The Badger Competition this month. Happy hunting!



A lot of us want to know exactly how you guys got where you are. I mean there are a lot of us who whish we could go to work only to play the latest games and on the best hardware. After that you test the latest mp3 players! How did you get this dream job? I would die for a job like that. Are there any openings?

Xcal 55

Ed: You know something... you're right, this is a great job. However, getting to where we are is more based on luck than any set of skills - and this is a serious answer. As for your second question, yes, there are openings and usually you'll find them where it's warm and moist.

Cover CD Request

[Cut! Most of this letter is about requesting a download, Ed] ...it's well over 300 MB, and just not doable on a modem. Would you mind terribly putting it on the next cover CD? I'm sure that you all knew about v1.6 way before me, and must hate constantly being told how to do your jobs, but I really have nowhere else to turn, except my cousin Larry, but I'd much rather pay the paltry R 35.00 for your magazine and have a solid CD to use at my leisure than clean out his basement for two hours on his broadband.

psyanide

Ed: Is this cousin Larry real family? What a tyrant, I'd tell mom!

LANs

First and foremost thanks for a great magazine. It's head and shoulders the best one of its kind available in SA. I recently got a GameCube and it's my first foray into the console market. After going through the novel experience of buying a game and not needing to

install it, drivers, troubleshooting etc., but only inserting the disc and playing it, I wondered why I would still bother with PC games. It dawned on me that there is one organisation alone that is keeping me from junking my PC. That organisation is Mayhem. They are surely the most efficient and experienced LAN organisers we are lucky enough to have. Any LAN with 200+ gamers merrily gaming and not bitching is a monumental achievement. (Except for the CS players but that's to be expected from 12 year olds!) Oh yeah, replying to 'Concerned Reader' in January 2004. He might be pedantic but the plural of mouse is mouses. Look it up.

--- [deleted to protect the writer, Ed]

Ed: That CS comment...:) Please don't give up the PC, you should also try and get yourself a PlayStation 2 and a GBA SP before all the new versions arrive... Regarding the mouse(s) thing - we only recognise English that's been around for at least 30 years (at least), we're a technology magazine after all.

Ghost Writer

Is Derek De La Fuente a real person? It seems no one ever writes much about him in NAG, yet he always gets to jet around the world, visiting some of the biggest game studios. If he does exist, he's one on the luckiest human beings in Africa, and I can understand why you never publish a picture of him - I know I'd like to be his friend, if I only knew what he looked like...

Christo

Ed: You sound a little like a potential stalker, remember friends are picked, not followed and stared at. Derek is our UK correspondent - he's been called many things but never a ghost... he also lives in the UK.

Front Cover

Since the October issue, the freaky little badger man has been my favourite thing in NAG. And in the November issue. freaky little badger man learnt the ability to teleport and appeared in the middle of the "G" and I was proud of my new friend. December came and I was excited to get to the shop so that I could find out what ability badger man learnt next. But to my great shock, freaky little badger man's spot on the NAG logo was taken by "cool fairy girl" (with a sword) and badger man was reduced to hide behind the British snipers head. I was sad and longed to see my fury friend on his spot in the middle of the "G". Now I have nothing against cool fairy girl (with a sword) and I think that she is quite cool. But I recently picked up the

Shorts

Fit it

In all the letters I sent I did not put an 'h 'in 'which 'I know you guys fix this but I want to make you aware that I can spell. So please don't insult my spelling mistakes.

Ed: Why do we always get all the nut jobs?

Half a day lost

Is that your GMT or my GMT? On the NAG forums, why are all times listed as GMT +12? SA time zones fall into GMT +2... Morgue [FLB]

Ed: I don't know - ask Miktar (miktar@nag.co.za)... he's the webmaster. It might have something to do with the fact that he doesn't eat any fruit or vegetables - Priest says he even clears the lettuce and tomato off his McDonalds Happy Meals.

Haiku about NAG

In honour of the all-mighty entity that is NAG, I have decided to construct a Japanese Haiku that reflects how I feel once I have completely finished reading an issue.

Bereft of NAG, Happiness fills me no more, Until the next issue.

Well not exactly authentic stuff but you get the idea :P. If this does get published, I await your notorious sarcasm.

Unknown

Ed: I think honesty is better - your 'poem'

January 2004 copy of NAG and started fuming. Not only did you take away fairy girl (with a sword) and freaky badger little man but you replaced badger and fairies spot on the logo with a blood splat! And on top of that, where badger man stood in November on the "G" there is a bloody hand print. You killed him, and he's never coming back! If you readers think that this is cruel visit www.thissitedoesnotexist.com and vote so that I can overthrow the NAG editor and finally rule the universe!

We think Shaun but it might be Chris

Ed: Actually. The cool fairy girl (with a sword) is the badger's new girlfriend - Lara was getting tiresome in the mornings. The badger then pledged his undying love to cool fairy girl (with a sword) and offered her his excellent



the situation - it almost seems as

Shorts

Make up your own

Your magazine is excellent but please bring back those cartoons and that 'smack talk' column and stop with all the ads, half the magazine is ads but apart from all that the magazine is the best.

Hilary

Ed: Okay we'll put more cartoons in and two peons talking rubbish and take out all the adverts - BTW the next issue will be our last one...;). You'll be happy to know that from this issue onwards NAG is going to stay at 124 pages until the gold runs out - that's a fat 24 extra pages to cater for the extra advertising and tons of content that seems to be falling from the sky. But the best news is that we're not increasing our price.

Short .

Is this short enough for your shorts? **Roscoe**

Ed: Depends on the whirligig.

Windows

I have recently bought a new case for my PC, and I want a window in my PC but I don't want to cut my case. I was wondering if you could tell me if there is anywhere in Johannesburg I can take my case to have a window put in?

P07H3@D

Ed: This is funny if you imagine getting this question about 6 years ago. You can contact Mexcom on (011) 791 7975, they will customise your PC in any which way you want.

perch with a view on the G. Badger then spent that issue swapping war stories with British sniper dude. But something terrible happened, cool fairy girl (with a sword) spoke ill of British sniper dude to G.I. Joe but unbeknownst to cool fairy girl (with a sword) G.I. Joe was indebted to British sniper dude for saving his life in the melon shelling fiasco of 1924 (just outside Prague). Duty bound G.I. Joe told British Sniper dude the terrible tale cool fairy girl (with a sword) told him. In a fit of rage British Sniper dude fired a single round at cool fairy girl (with a sword) the bullet tore through her heart while she sat sharpening her blade on the badger's excellent perch with a view on the G. The grief stricken badger, desperate for vengeance made a terrible pact with the devil and as he dipped his paw in the warm blood he vowed to

avenge cool fairy girl (with a sword) and made his bloody mark on his excellent perch with a view on the G. The badger now waits for British Sniper dude; badger is patient, badger knows Call of Duty 2 is coming, and then he'll have his revenge, then he'll send British Sniper dude's black soul to the devil in exchange for another chance with cool fairy girl (with a sword). Badger sharpens his claws, badger waits - the

January Issue Errors!

Hey there just want to say this is a great magazine. The last couple of issues nothing on the CDs worked or unzipped. Can you just tell me what's wrong? **Louis**

Ed: Perhaps you should try brushing out your inlet manifold actuators. Not many people know this but during winter the tube array contracts slightly causing a slight variance in the flow control and naturally with increased power this variance increases and often causes the kind of problems you've been experiencing. Sorry, this is about as detailed as I can go based on your mail...

Piracy vs. Price again...

In last months issue, you shot down Shaun for saying that if games were cheaper then piracy would be lessened. Well, I think you simply don't get it! Of course lowering game prices will slow down piracy - why do you think DVD prices have reduced? Come on - stop denying the obvious. Go into a games distributor like Incredible Connection or CNA and just look at the prices of some games - up to R 500 + . Now go to the flea market and see that the same game goes for R 100. It does not take a genius to figure out where the purchase will occur. I am quite happy to pay R 200 for a good original but R 500+, what are these people smoking? (Unless like you Ed, they earn big salaries and don't seem to mind spending that kind of cash.) I don't support piracy, in fact it sucks, but I can't help being swayed to the flea markets where you get games at a good price and they are recent - not like some of our "slow to get" retailers. You want to stop piracy? Drop the prices, get the recent releases and stop fooling yourself that price doesn't count.

Alan

Ed: This is an absurd argument and this kind of attitude does very little to help

though you're trying to justify piracy. Let's just try and get our facts straight before we say anything more. A legitimate copy of Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic retails for R 299.00 [average] this is for 4 CDs, a 74 page manual, a DVD case and a sleeve insert. For a pirate copy costing R149.00 you get a jewel case, a summarised and badly photocopied [2-8 page] manual and front cover, if you're lucky, 4 CDs and a 'cracked .exe' so you can't patch the game. That's a difference of R 150.00. Please note: there are exceptions. Your argument doesn't hold much water, in your reality you're just justifying what you do by focusing on the *R* 500+ exceptions instead of the *R* 150.00 you're actually saving by buying a substandard pirate game. But I doubt that you'll see it this way. Overall, this is more of a culture problem - in South Africa 'gamers' are used to playing 4-8 new titles a month, usually for free or at worst R149.00. The only people winning here are the hardware vendors who are more than happy to take all that money everyone should be spending on software so they can upgrade their rigs to run the stolen software. Pretty soon there'll be little point in developing titles for the PC thanks to piracy so carry on saving all that money so you can buy hardware but remember to stash a little away each month so you can by a console one day. [addendum: during the last month I've received a number of mails from people encouraging NAG to keep highlighting this problem, others have told me to be more sympathetic and perhaps encourage anti-piracy instead of discouraging piracy [although I'm not really sure what this means I guess the point is... be more proactive]. Others accuse me of sitting on an unrealistic

Community.za disaster

In the January 2004 issue I noticed that the community.za section had been reduced to a measly, single page. Chace

perch because I get to play all the latest

games on the best hardware for free -

be a reason to condone piracy?

this may be true but certainly shouldn't

However, despite all the negatives and

some gamers do take this kind of thing

positives it's encouraging to see that

seriously and occasionally do buy a

Ed: This section is like a rollercoaster -



A deeper look into 'gaming'

What exactly is gaming? Why is gaming classified in certain categories if it is one thing at the end of the day? Why such names as Newbie, Hardcore or even Geek? I mean if I'm not mistaken, gaming is the act of playing an electronic game for the sake of entertainment. By electronic game, I mean anything from Mario to Max Payne 2. Now, just a few days ago I was playing an excellent game of Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania, when my older brother told me to shove off and let a 'real' gamer play. Now this got me < rude word > off so I asked him to elaborate on his definition of a 'real' gamer and here was his answer, "well, us real gamers play 'real' games like UT, Max Payne and GTA." Now let's go back to my definition of gaming and gamers and let's compare his with mine. Different aren't they? Well, I'd like to know from you Ed, what is the exact definition of gaming, and why are classifications as Newbie etc. used? Also what is the distinction between a Hardcore gamer and a Geek? Oh, and there's something else, what's the difference between a geek and a nerd? One of them means a 'know-it-all' doesn't it? It gets confusing doesn't it? All these names and classifications I mean. You know what I personally think? I think that all these names need to be ditched, and we can all be referred to as just gamers because there's not much of a difference between us all is there? the real_laracroft

Ed: Tell that pinhead brother of yours to pump his smack talk to the curb and bust it fat dude - can you tell I made that up? Right, a nerd is what dumb people called intelligent people back in the eighties; calling someone a nerd now is lame, it's out of fashion. Nerds, unlike jeans, didn't make it into 2000. A geek is basically the same as a nerd just travelling under a different sports label. In terms of hardcore gamers. I really can't tell you what the difference is as this is purely a subjective opinion- I might be hardcore because I've been playing games since I was 10 or Bob Flanders down the road might be a hardcore gamer because he spends 23° hours playing Counter-Strike and eating jelly. Oh, and a newbie is someone who battles with minefield. So have two EA games and tell that bully brother of yours he can't play your games because he's a jock-strap power gamer with an inadequacy complex.

it has its ups and downs and how much fun you have all depends on how many people get on. It depends on what is happening on the local scene, which usually takes a bit of a break over the December/early January period.

2

An examination

One of the things that makes working for NAG so great is that everyone wants your job. Everyone. Even the Pope would recognize the fringe benefits attached to writing for a successful gaming magazine. No, this isn't going to be another tirade about how we actually work hard and don't just play games for a living - no matter how true it is, or how any times we explain it to people, they are going to stick to their preconceived notions that we don't actually work at all. Instead, I am going to point out an important fact that is often overlooked by wannabe NAG employees. To work here, you need to be able to write.

Writing is sort of like singing; everyone thinks they can do it. And jut because you think you sound good in the shower doesn't mean you can rush off to the next Idols audition and become a superstar. The fact that people

probably bang on the bathroom door and scream is a likely indicator that your singing sucks. Recently, the Almighty Ed received an email asking about how one would go about becoming a "game examiner." The first clue is right there in that phrase... "game examiner." Writing is about putting the right word in the right place, and "examiner" certainly is not the right word here. But he's a kindly sort, our Ed, in a sort of experimental, Pavlovian

way, so he got back to this character who sent the mail, telling him to send in an eight hundred word review on any game he liked. Hope does, after all, spring eternal and, quite frankly, virtually the entire NAG crew (permanent and freelance alike) was gathered together in this manner. You never know when you get a diamond in the rough. Personally, "examiner" was just a little too rough for me.

The reply arrived moments later. This was another clue. Writing eight hundred words takes a little time but, apparently, our eager applicant was pretty quick with the two finger tango across the keyboard. So Ed opened the

Let's take a moment to review the situation here... the applicant for the game "examiner" position was asked to write an eight hundred word review on one game. This seemed to have been misunderstood by said applicant to be around eight hundred game reviews of one word each. I can't quote directly here (because I still haven't managed to figure out the Ed's password on his PC) but the gist of each review was something

"This game is cool. Good graphics. The story is nice. I like to play it."

Fair enough. It brings across the idea, but the page layout for that review would be challenging to say the least. And we do try to use fairly complete sentences in most reviews as well.

When you get down to it, the applicant did

write a review - a number of them, in fact (based, I believe, on our cover CD demos for that month.) What he said in his reviews was essentially the crux of every review... he got to the point and stayed there,

shunning all those useless things like creativity and imagination. What he did not do, though, was write enough, or well enough. He might be on to something, though. Hey, here's a plan. Let's cut all our reviews down to three sentence specials. That way we can save on printing costs (because the magazine will be an A4 flyer) and all the game "examiners" can spend the millions you lot think we earn on the twenty nine and a half days off we'll have each month. I mean, after all, our readers don't

expect talent or ability. Hell, most of them just look at the scores and screen shots anyway. We could hire a bunch of chimpanzees to write the articles. We can print 124 pages worth of "I.asghlhdgiidfflwxxyi" and no one would even notice, I'll wager.

The reason I say that is, judging by our game "examiner" applicant's sample articles, the actual words in the magazine don't matter. 800 words on a game? Bah, I just want pictures!

Next time you think that you may want to write for a magazine like NAG, save a little dignity by trying to write a review before hand. Make it long. 800 words. Show it to a friend before you show it to us. This will cut down the amount of laughter in our office, sure, but it will also give us a bit of time to get some REAL writing done. If, after writing this test review, you don't think its good enough (be honest now) then be realistic and find another job to strive for. Like plumbing. It pays better and you have less crap to deal with.



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next month:

Soft Stuff: [Hedgehogs]

Predicting the future is a little like trying to catch a fish with a toothpick. But try we will... We do know for a fact that X2: The Threat will finally end up in the magazine as well as Contract Jack and Metal Gear 2: Substance as well as a few others we can't name right now for personal reasons. Aside from games we are interviewing Nokia and Logitech to try and figure out if keyboards and cellular phones will ever be able to talk to each other. There's also another great feature planned concerning survival horror games [see pictured zombie dude] and something to help you better understand how benchmarking works - we hope.

Hard Stuff: [Tortoises]

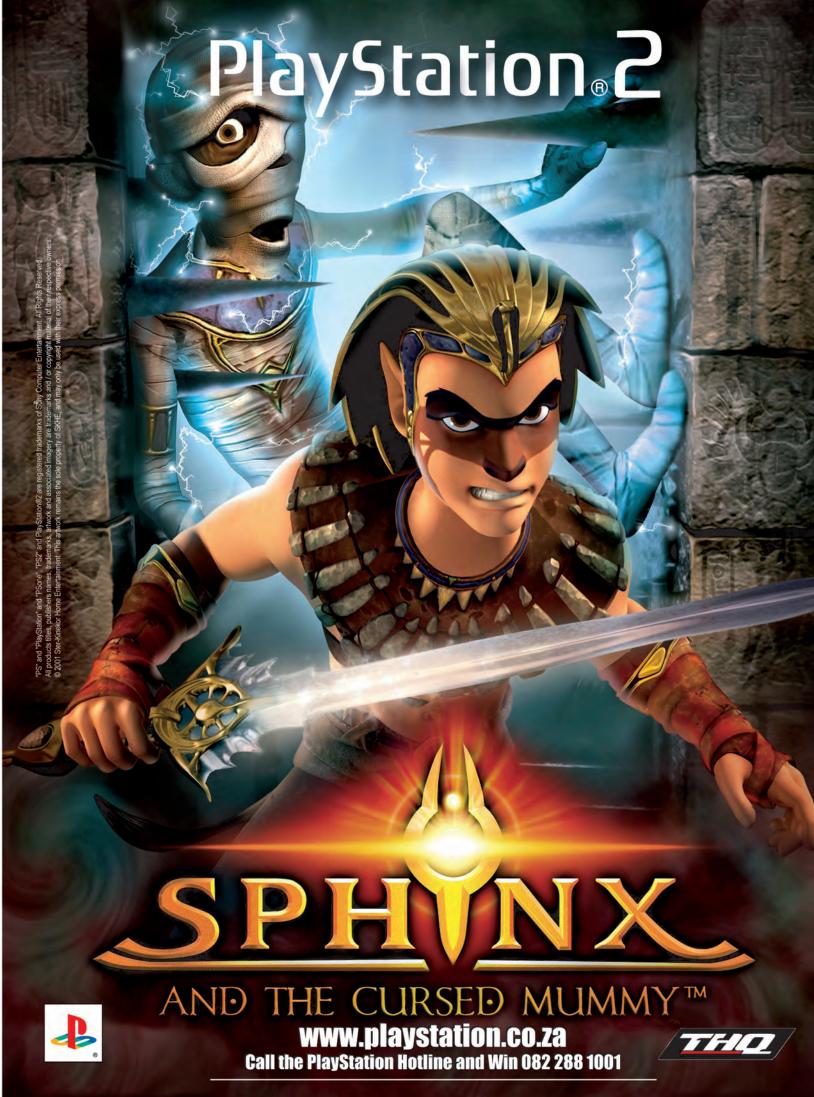
There is enough hardware in this office to stock a PC shop for a year - we're actually so sick and tired of looking at it all we've come close to putting it all in a sack and tossing it over a bridge*. But really, we're doing a round-up of portable storage in the April issue and as usual pages and pages of other hardware goodies that we don't have space to list here...

*Pictures in the next issue, if we pull it off.

The April issue will be on-shelf 25 March 2004.

Disclaimer: This disclaims the previous message. [Message to readers] Some of the items mentioned here might not actually end up in the April issue - this is just the way of things sometimes and we're afraid you're going to have to learn to live with it.









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